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Hazleton, Catherine

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The California Assembly: Not “Safe” for Women?

**Why Women Disproportionately Run for and Win Competitive
Seats, as Opposed to Safe Seats, in the California Assembly
&
The Related Implications for Women Candidates and
Legislators**

By Catherine Hazelton

November 1, 2005

Abstract: This paper proves statistically that, since at least 1992, women have been more likely to run for competitive seats in the California assembly than for seats that are safe for their party. In other words, women have been more likely to run for seats that are difficult to win and are arguably more challenging to represent in the legislature. The paper examines why this has been true over the last seven election cycles (1992-2004) and how these findings affect women candidates and legislators. It also makes recommendations for using these findings to increase the number and power of women in the legislature.

Keywords: Women, legislators, California, assembly, marginal, competitive

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for
Professor Bruce Cain

University of California, Berkeley

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The author can be reached at chazelton@gmail.com.

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Executive Summary

Since at least 1992, women have been more likely to run for competitive seats in the California assembly than for seats that are safe for their party. In other words, women have been more likely to run for seats that are difficult to win and are arguably more challenging to represent in the legislature. This paper examines why this has been true over the last seven election cycles (1992-2004) and how these findings affect women candidates and legislators. It also makes recommendations for using these findings to increase the number and power of women in the legislature.

Statistical analysis proves that:

- Democratic women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for seats their party is expected to win or lose;
- Republican women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for seats their party is expected win; and
- Women are more likely to win races for competitive seats than races for safe seats; therefore they are more likely to represent competitive districts in the assembly.

Combining this analysis with interviews of women who have run for and held competitive assembly seats, interviews with male Republican political consultants, and academic studies, we are able to learn why women run for and win these seats. Findings indicate that:

- Women have fewer opportunities to run for safe seats;
- When parties recruit women to run for office, it is usually in competitive districts (there is usually a long line of insiders ready to run for safe seats when they become available);
- Republican women have a considerably difficult time winning party primaries, especially for safe seats; and
- Voter stereotypes about women candidates, the issues handled by the state legislature and the personal qualities that many women possess better position women to win competitive elections.

We also learn that women representing competitive districts legislate differently from their colleagues. Marginal members:

- Experience more freedom to vote contrary to party recommendations, but are also subject to more scrutiny and pressure from opponents and interest groups;
- Are less likely to introduce sweeping or revolutionary legislation but receive more assistance crafting a strong bill package;
- Are usually not considered for leadership positions within the legislature although many report satisfaction with their roles as committee chairs;
- Spend more time in their districts working with constituents and using the leaderships traits commonly associated with women to build consensus among diverse groups; these factors often make women legislators a good fit for marginal districts.

Evaluating the findings noted above, and working from the assumptions that gender parity is desirable and that women members would like to see women hold top legislative leadership posts, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- Women in competitive seats should support redistricting efforts to create more competitive districts and should actively participate in the redistricting process;
- The Republican party should recruit, train and fund more women to run in competitive districts, including working to help them win their party primaries;
- The Democratic party should recruit, train and fund more women to run in safe seats;
- If parties want to neutralize the gender advantage of the opposing party's female candidate, they should find more women to run;
- Assemblywomen should identify, groom and raise money for women to replace themselves and other members;
- Marginal women should rally their female colleagues to stand in solidarity to elect a woman leader; and
- Marginal female members should negotiate with leadership in order for themselves and other female members to have more power in the budget process.

Each of these recommendations can alter the imbalance in the types of assembly seats women seek while increasing their ranks and bolstering their power as legislators.

Introduction – Unlikely coincidence sparks research, scope of paper defined

In July of 2004 I was struck by a surprising coincidence in a *Los Angeles Times* article about California's upcoming legislative races: all six incumbent assemblymembers targeted by Democrats and Republicans for electoral elimination that fall were women (Rau). Statistically, there is less than a one in one thousand chance that all six of the targeted incumbents would be women.¹ This made me curious; why were only women targeted? Because it is most efficient for party leaders to target the most competitive assembly seats, I hypothesized that women must be more likely to represent these marginal districts. This assumption proved true; statistically, both Democratic and Republican women are more likely to run for competitive seats than seats that are sure winners or losers for their party. They are also more likely to represent competitive districts, as opposed to safe districts, in the legislature. After discussing the analysis used to prove these claims, this paper will examine why women are more likely to run for competitive seats. Key reasons include:

- Women face significant barriers to running for safe seats, including:
 - The existence of "old boys networks" within the Democratic and Republican parties that often select and support male candidates to run for safe seats; and
 - Considerable resistance from Republican leaders and voters to supporting women candidates in primary elections for safe Republican seats;

¹ With 37 men and 19 women running for re-election, the probability that the 6 members targeted for electoral challenge would all be women is .000835 or 1 in 1198.

- Both major political parties are more likely to recruit women to run for competitive seats; and
- Women benefit from multiple advantages that may make them more formidable candidates than men in competitive assembly races, including:
 - Voter willingness to cross party lines to support a woman candidate; and, potentially,
 - Personality and leadership traits common among women that may be compatible with the needs of a competitive district.

The paper will then consider potential electoral and legislative implications for women currently serving and aspiring to serve in the state assembly. Finally the paper makes recommendations for how these findings might be used to improve women’s electoral and legislative success.

Methodology and limitations – Findings are supported by statistical analysis, interviews, and academic literature

This study examines trends over the last seven biennial elections for seats in the California assembly. These parameters were chosen to achieve the following purposes:

- To observe current rather than longitudinal trends;
- To include enough data to establish statistical significance; and
- To include 1992, “the year of the women,” the benchmark year for women in electoral politics when women began to win assembly (and other) seats in larger numbers.²

To limit confounding variables and ensure statistical significance, I chose not to include the state senate in this analysis. The paper does not project future trends, but assumes that existing patterns will hold unless significant changes are made such as the redrawing of assembly district lines.

In order to establish statistically that women have been more likely to run for competitive seats than other types of seats, I relied heavily on the district-by-district analysis of assembly seats provided by the *California Journal*. Before every legislative election, the *California Journal* ranks each assembly district as “Safe Democratic,” “Safe Republican,” “Leans Democratic,” “Leans Republican,” or “Toss Up.”³ It also provides voter registration data for each district, the name and party of each candidate, and a contextual analysis of some races. I used the rankings

² According to Michele Swers, “analyses of the 1992 election indicate that the primary role of women’s issues in the presidential and congressional campaigns and the media’s combined focus on women’s issues and the underrepresentation of women in office helped women candidates, particularly those who emphasized gender in their campaigns” (170). For an illustration of the impact of the year of the woman on the California assembly please see Figure J on page 28, “Women in California Assembly Over Time.” In short, the number of Democratic women in the assembly doubled from nine to 18.

³ Only one candidate unaffiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party was elected to the Assembly during this time period, Green party member Audie Bock, a woman who ran successfully in 1998 but lost her re-election bid in 2000. Her race is considered in these calculations; it is evaluated as a Safe Democratic seat with no female candidate running as a Democrat or Republican.

to classify each district creating three categories. I refer to those designated as “Safe Democratic” by that classification or as “expected wins for Democrats.” Safe Republican seats are similarly classified here. I combined *California Journal’s* final three classifications to create a category of races I call “competitive.” Those ranked as “Toss Up” are obviously more competitive than those that “Lean Democratic” or “Lean Republican,” but the many surprising swings in these races supported their inclusion in this category. After classifying each of the 80 districts from 1992 through 2004 by competitiveness and party, I noted the gender of each candidate, determined by information provided in the *California Journal*, personal familiarity with candidates, and by searching the Internet for additional information about candidates. Resources published by California’s secretary of state provided election results.

Using descriptive statistics, I began to evaluate when and where women have run for the assembly as well as trends in each party. I then ran several statistical tests, relying heavily on t-tests to test for statistically significant differences between groups. Key findings are discussed in the section below on statistical analysis. Several graphs and tables demonstrating these findings and others are provided in the body of the paper.

To test and support the statistical research, I interviewed 12 current and former assemblywomen. I attempted to interview a diverse group of women who meet the following criteria:

- They have served at least one term in the assembly; and
- They ran for a competitive seat in the assembly in at least one of the seven elections between 1992 and 2004.

The interviewees were: DeDe Alpert, Julie Bornstein, Debra Bowen, Susan Davis, Tricia Hunter, Hannah-Beth Jackson, Betty Karnette, Lynne Leach, Carol Liu, Barbara Matthews, Gloria Negrete McLeod, and Nicole Parra. Additional information about the interviewees is available in the Appendix.

I tried to interview women who had run for and served in the assembly at different times throughout the twelve-year period this paper considers. Under term limits, no one served more than three terms in the assembly. In most years, five of the women interviewed were running for California’s lower house. Four ran in 1996, three ran in 1998, and six ran in 2004.

Interviewees were more likely to have represented portions of Southern California, especially San Diego. This is explained by the location of the state’s competitive seats and the electorate’s willingness to elect women in these areas. The interviewees ran in the following regions: San Diego area (5), Los Angeles County (3), San Bernardino County (1), the Central Coast (1), and the Central Valley/Bay Area (3).

Ten interviewees were Democrats and two were Republicans. Two factors limited my ability to obtain more Republican interviews. First, many fewer Republican women than Democratic women have been elected to competitive seats; therefore, the list of potential interviewees was quite small. Further only two such Republican women held seats in the legislature while I was writing and researching this paper. While nine out of ten Democratic interviewees held assembly or senate seats in 2004 and were thus relatively easy to reach, I had only two such

options among Republicans. Unfortunately, both denied multiple interview requests. However, I was able to locate two former Republican assemblywomen to interview.

Because I could not interview a representative number of Republican assemblywomen, I interviewed two veteran Republican campaign consultants who have extensive credentials working with both male and female Republican assembly members and candidates and on competitive and non-competitive races. Because of their candor and the sensitive nature of our discussions, I have assigned them pseudonyms. The interviewee referred to as “Steve Rogers,” is a senior consultant with a well-established Sacramento political consulting firm. “Chris Wideman” is a partner with another well-regarded firm.

Several other male and female assemblymembers, assembly staff, and political consultants contributed to this research through informal conversations. Because I did not request permission to use their comments in this paper they are not credited by name.

Additionally, I drew upon the myriad experiences I had and interactions I witnessed while working for Democratic assemblymembers Jack Scott and Carol Liu in 1997 and 1999-2003. Other insight is drawn from experiences working on Democratic political campaigns between 1992 and 2004 and as a volunteer political and legislative strategist for the California National Organization for Women since 1997.

In order to mitigate the limitations of these anecdotal accounts, I examined recent academic literature about women candidates and members of state legislatures. Searching the articles published since 1999 in a dozen political science journals, including *Women & Politics*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *American Political Research*, I found useful articles on topics ranging from voters’ attitudes about women candidates to the role political parties play in shaping women’s electoral opportunities. I also considered several recent books including Kim Fridkin Kahn’s *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns*. Most instructive was Cindy Simon Rosenthal’s commonly cited *When Women Lead: Integrative Leadership in State Legislatures* which examines the ways women legislative leaders operate differently from men.

Statistical analysis – Women are more likely to run for competitive seats, especially among Democrats

Using information obtained by *California Journal* about candidates and the districts in which they ran between 1992 and 2004, I was able to determine that both Democratic and Republican women have been more likely to run for competitive seats than seats that are safe for their party. Additionally, I found that Democratic women were more likely to run for competitive seats than seats that they were expected to lose. This is not true for Republican women, whom I have proven were more likely than Democratic women to run for districts in which they could only play the role of “sacrificial lamb,” campaigning with no chance of winning. I also found that women are more likely to win competitive races than campaigns for safe seats; they hold a much larger proportion of competitive seats in the assembly than they do safe seats. Finally, I found

that campaigns for competitive seats were more likely to pair two female candidates than campaigns for safe seats.

In order to see differences among the kinds of seats for which men and women have campaigned, I first looked at some simple bar graphs. The first two figures (A and B) demonstrate visually that while Democratic women ran for all types of seats, Democratic men ran for far fewer competitive seats than expected wins or losses.

Figure A

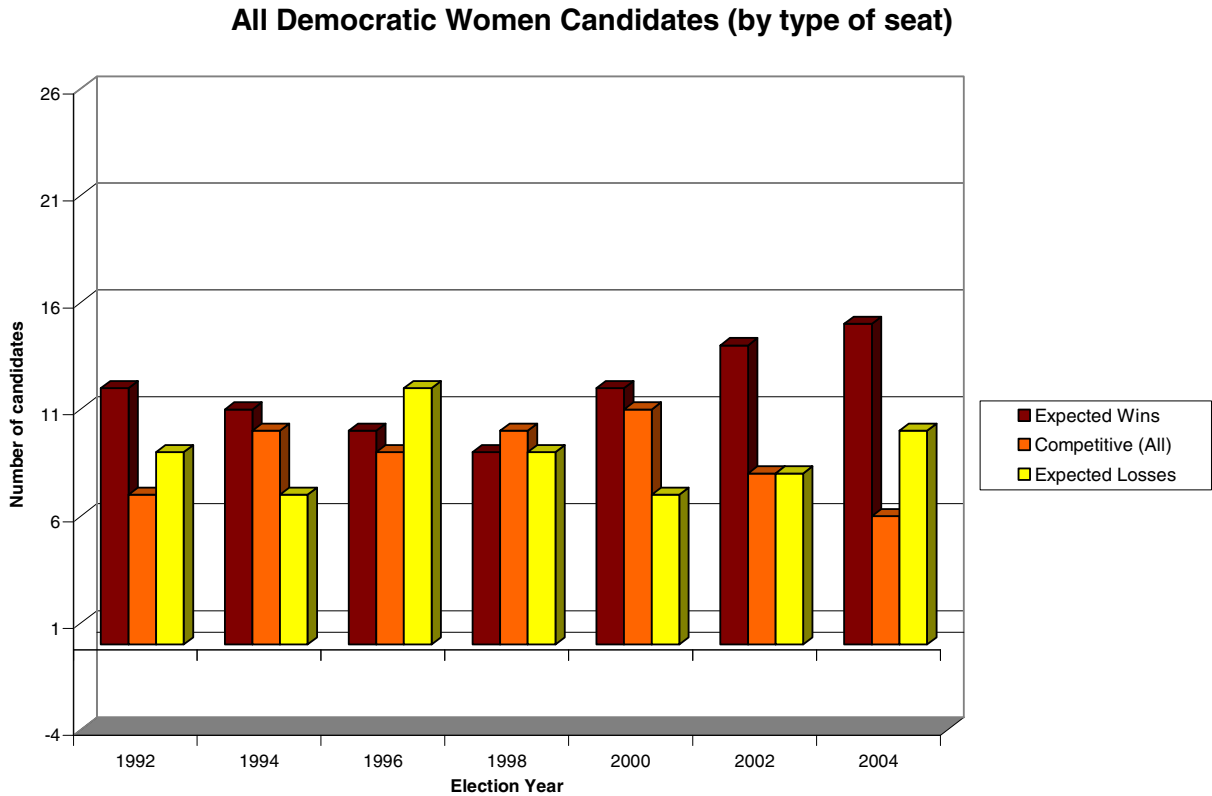
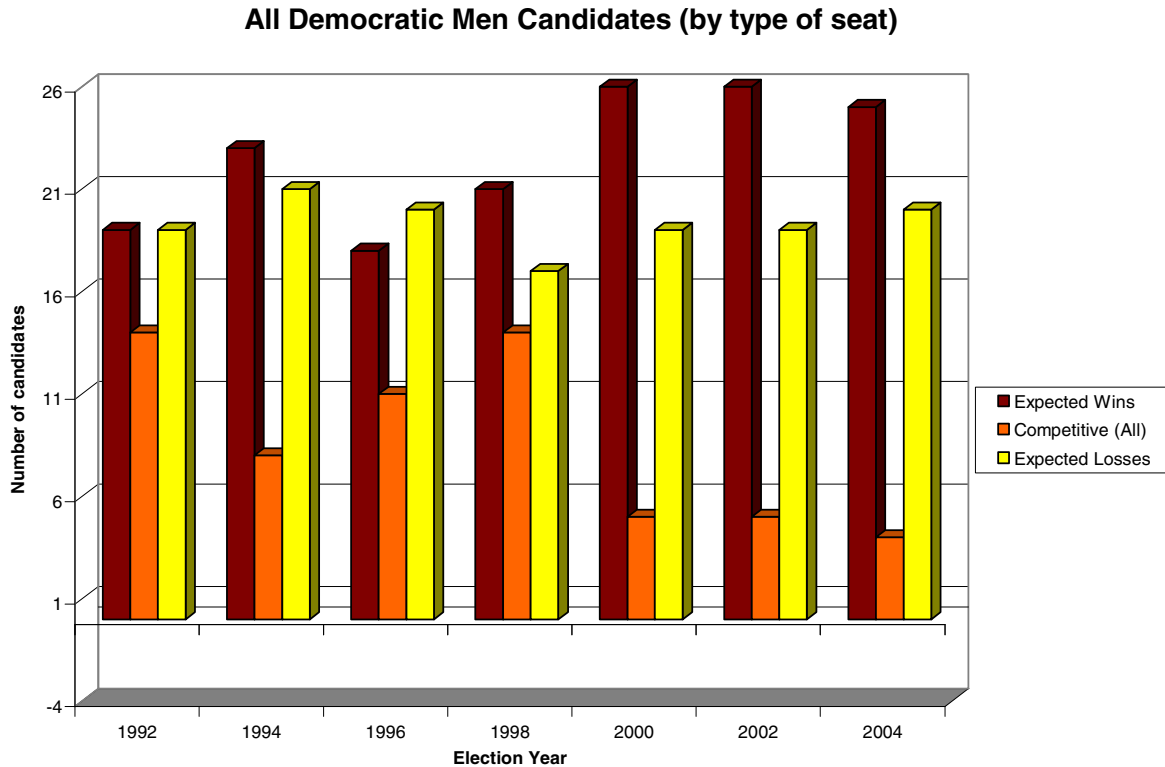


Figure B



The next two figures (C and D on page 11) show that while Republican women ran for more seats they were expected to lose than competitive seats or expected wins, Republican men ran for mostly expected wins and losses and fewer competitive seats.

While these visuals are instructive, they tell an incomplete story. In every election between 1992 and 2004, there were fewer competitive seats than Safe Democratic or Safe Republican seats. This explains why men in both parties were less likely to run for competitive seats than safe ones. However, something else must explain why women's patterns didn't follow those of their male counterparts. Using t-tests for significance, I tested whether women were more likely to run for competitive seats than other kinds of seats. As seen in the Figures E and F on pages 9 and 10, these tests did have significant results. Among Democrats, women ran in half of the competitive races. This is a much higher proportion than seen in other types of races. Women comprised only 34.4% of the Democrats running for Safe Democratic seats and 31.5% of the Democratic candidates for Safe Republican seats. With t-scores of -2.855 and -3.299 respectively, Democratic women were significantly more likely to run for competitive seats than they were to run for Safe Democratic or Safe Republican seats ($p < .01$). Similarly, Republican women were more likely to run for competitive seats. While 23% of Republican candidates for competitive seats were women, only 12.7% of Safe Republican seats and 17.8% of Safe Democratic seats saw Republican woman candidates. With a t-score of -2.295 Republican women were significantly more likely to run for competitive seats than Safe Republican seats ($p < .05$). However, statistically, Republican women were no more likely to run for competitive seats than they were to run for seats they were expected to lose.

Figure C

All Republican Women Candidates (by type of seat)

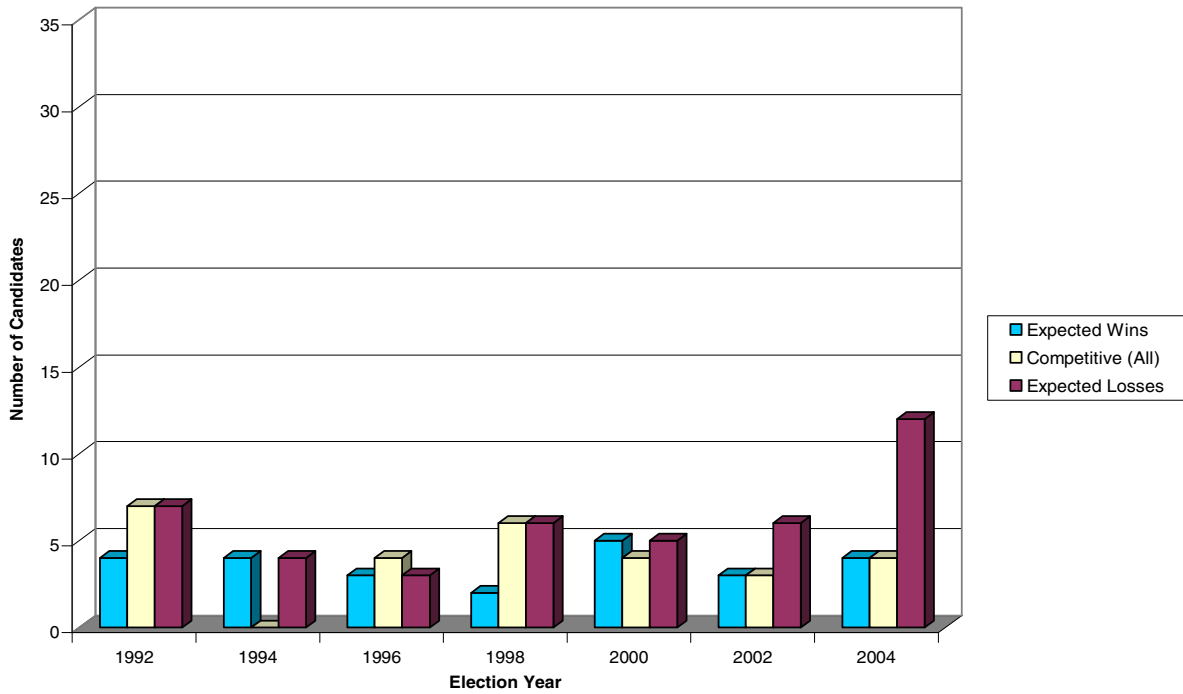


Figure D

All Republican Men Candidates (by type of seat)

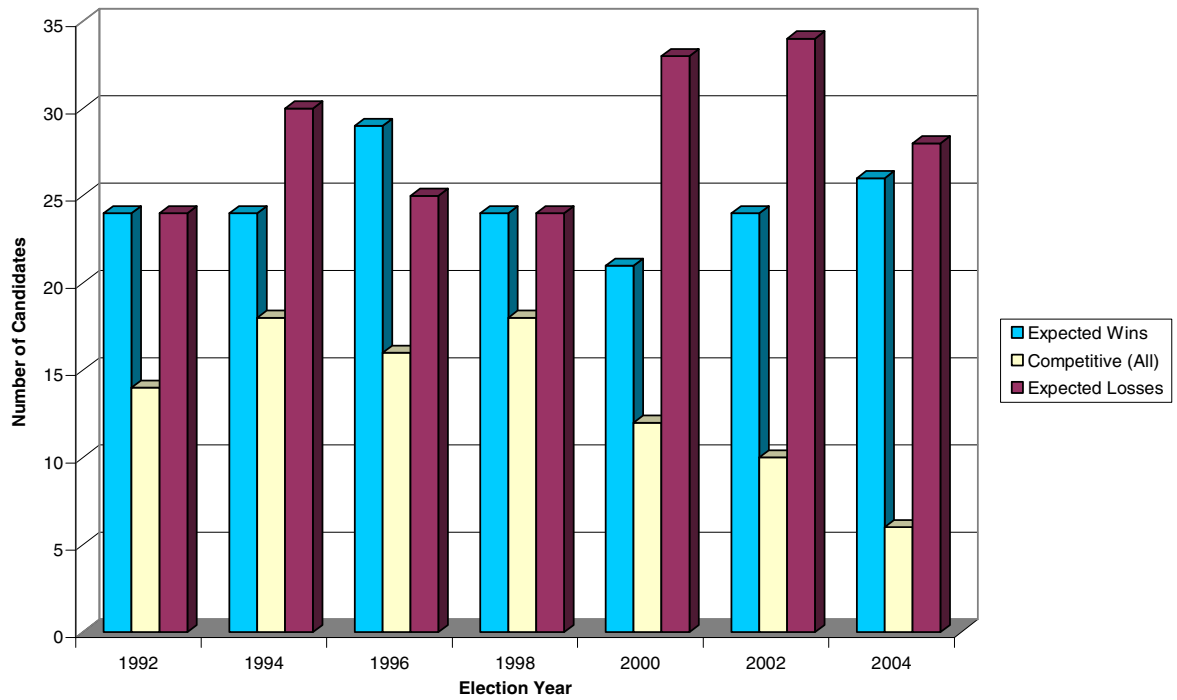


Figure E

Types of Seats Sought by Democratic Women Candidates (% of all Democratic candidates who were women, by type of seat)

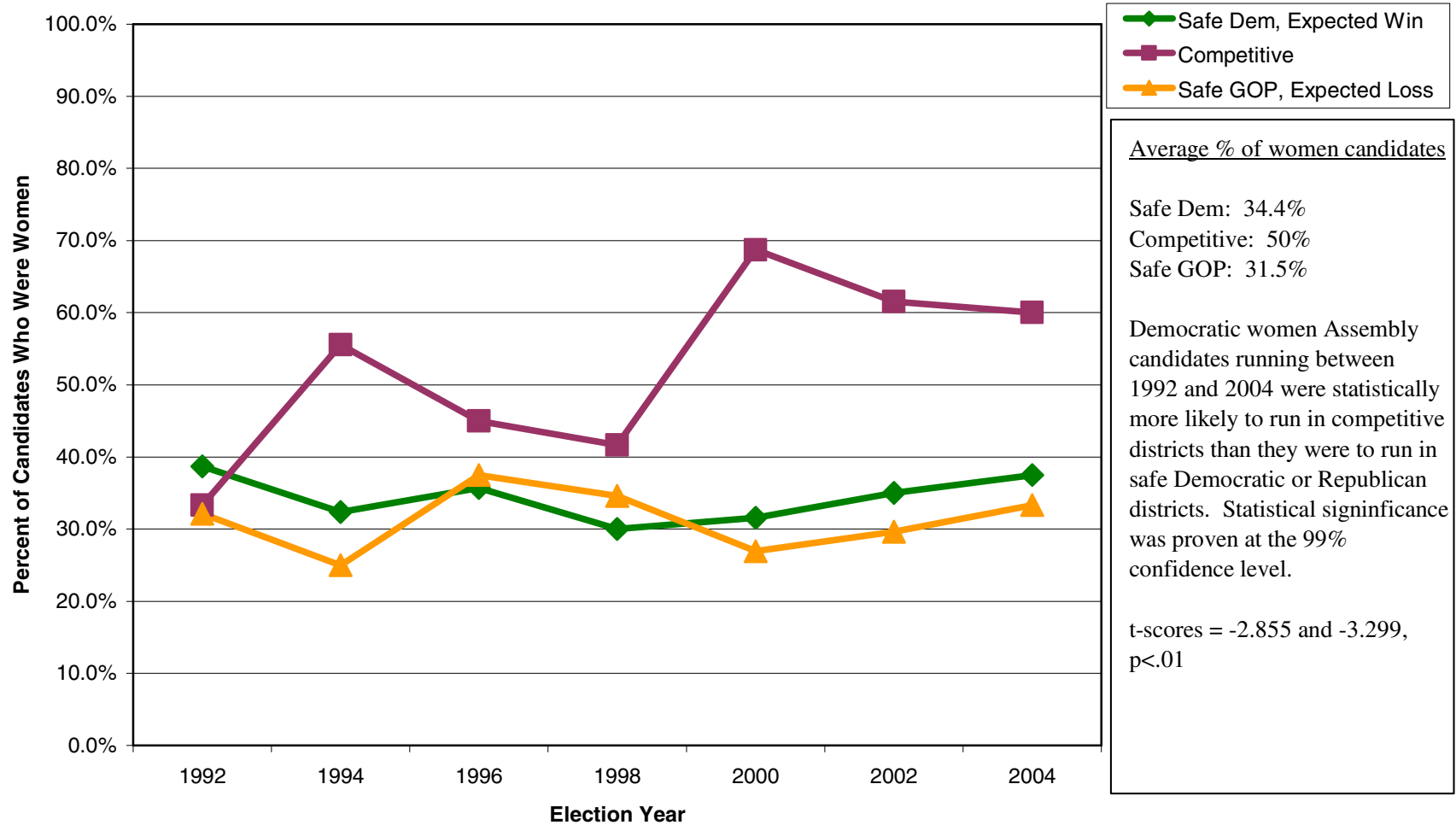
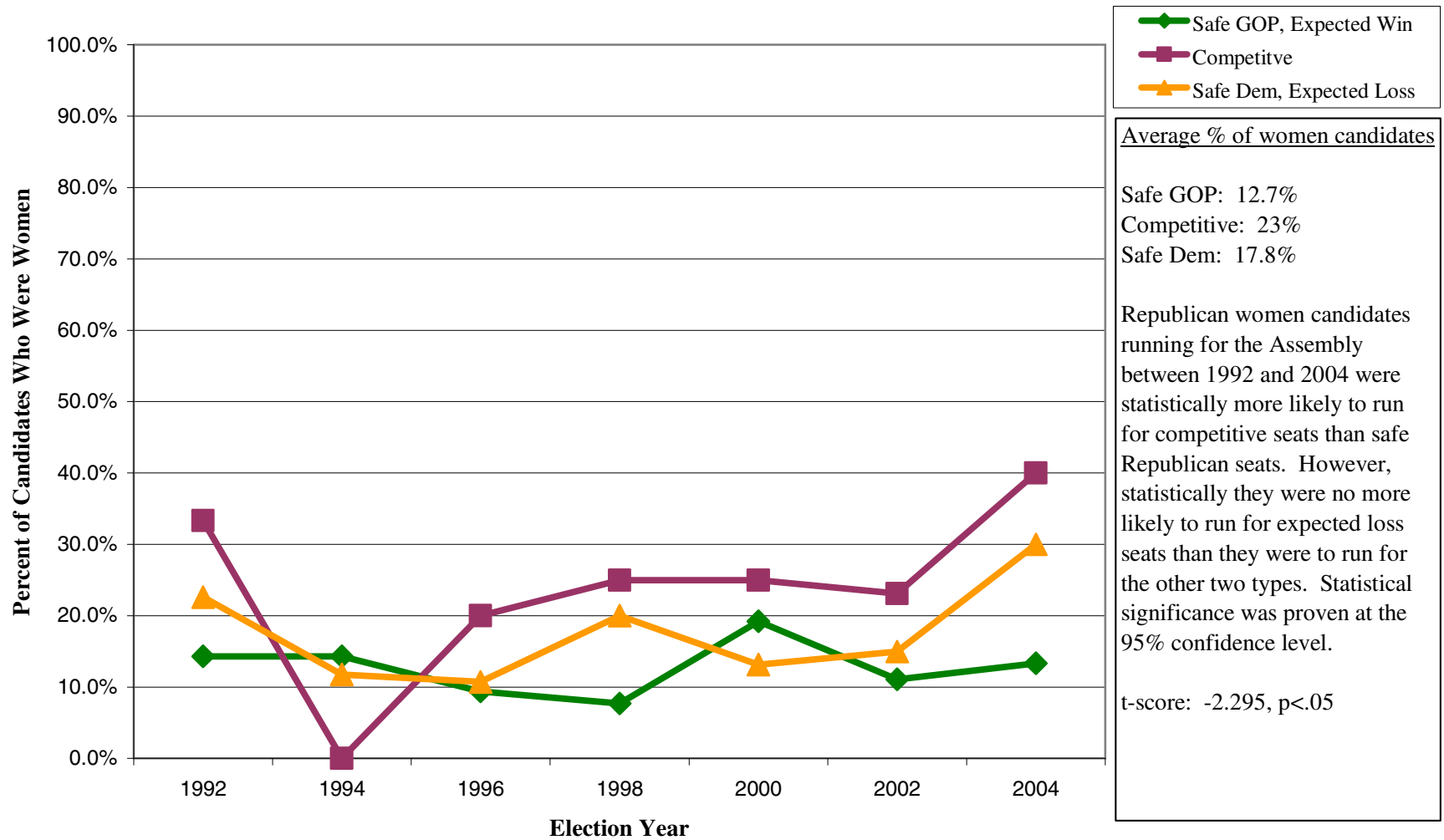


Figure F

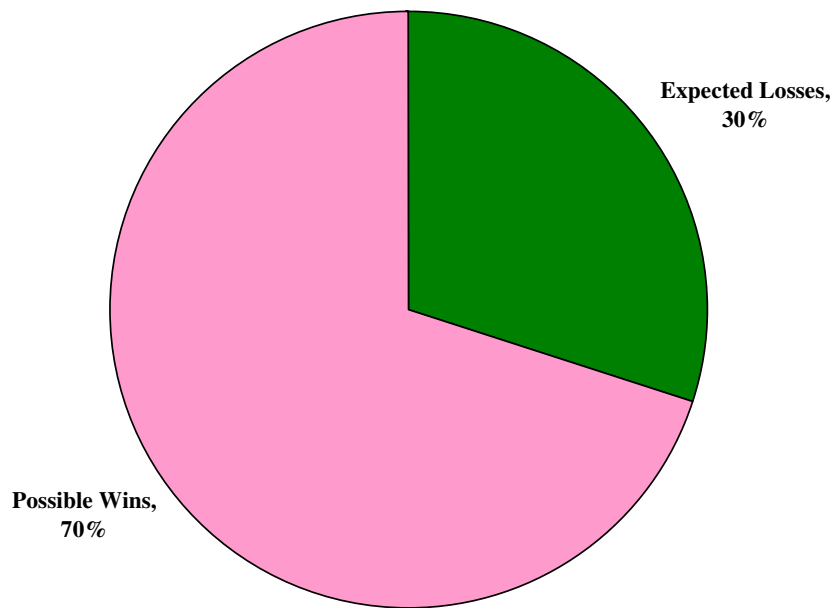
Types of Seats Sought by Republican Women Candidates (% of all Democratic candidates who were women, by type of seat)



The fact that there was not significant variation between the proportion of expected loss seats and competitive seats Republican women ran for caused me to question whether they were more likely than Democratic women to run for seats they were expected to lose. As shown in Figures G and H on pages 11 and 12, in only 30.1% of the seats Democratic women ran were they expected to lose. Republican women were expected to lose 44.8% of the seats for which they ran. Running another t-test, I found that this conclusion was significant (t-score: 2.451, $p < .01$). Republican women have been more likely than Democratic women to run for seats they can't win.⁴

Figure G

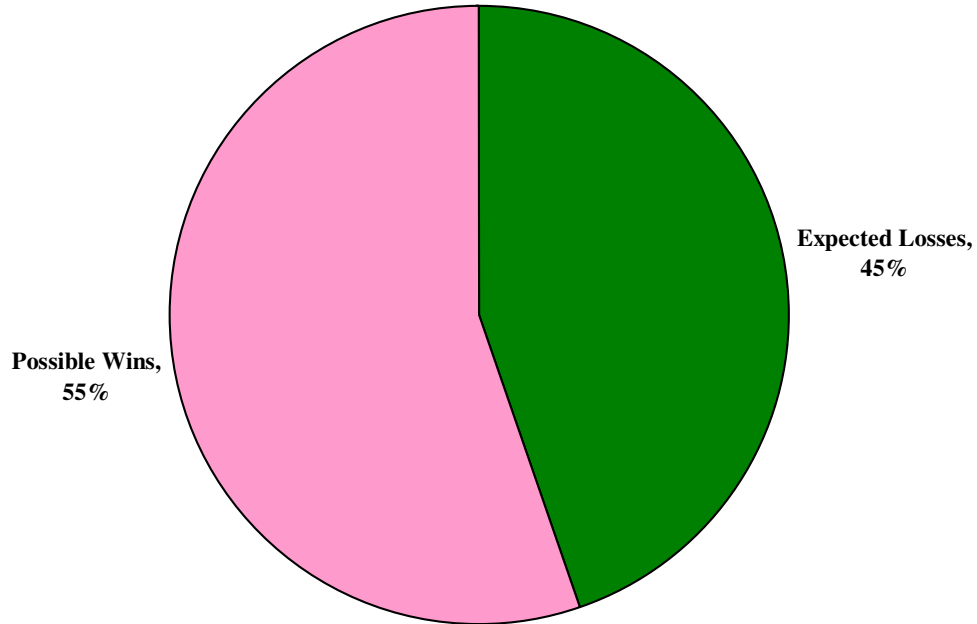
Types of Seats for Which Democratic Women Run



⁴ This difference cannot be explained entirely by the fact that since 1992 Republicans in general have been more likely to run in assembly contests they are expected to lose (43% of Republican candidates versus 35.2% of Democratic candidates, t-score: -2.683, $p < .01$). When I tested male candidates who run for seats they are expected to lose, there was no statistical difference between the 38.1% of Democratic male candidates and 42.7% of Republican male candidates (t-score: -1.332). It appears that the higher proportions within their parties of Republican women running for losing seats and Democrat women running for seats they could win at least partially explain the difference.

Figure H

Types of Seats for Which Republican Women Run



The preceding data prove that women have been more likely to run for competitive seats without indicating whether their campaigns have been successful. Indeed, women have been more likely to win in competitive districts than in non-competitive districts. As shown in Figure I on page 13, women have held 41% of the competitive seats in the legislature since 1992. However, women held only 25% of the safe seats during that same period (Figure J, page 13). These results are highly statistically significant (t-score: 3.259, $p < .01$): women are considerably more likely to win in and thus represent competitive districts.

Figure I

Competitive Seats (1992-2005)

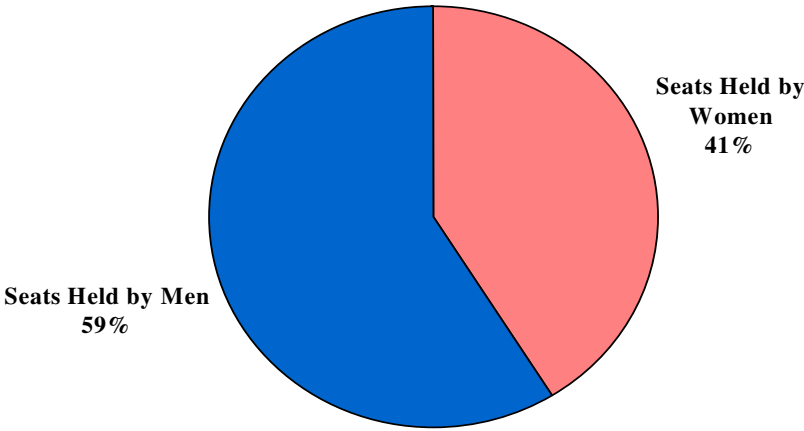
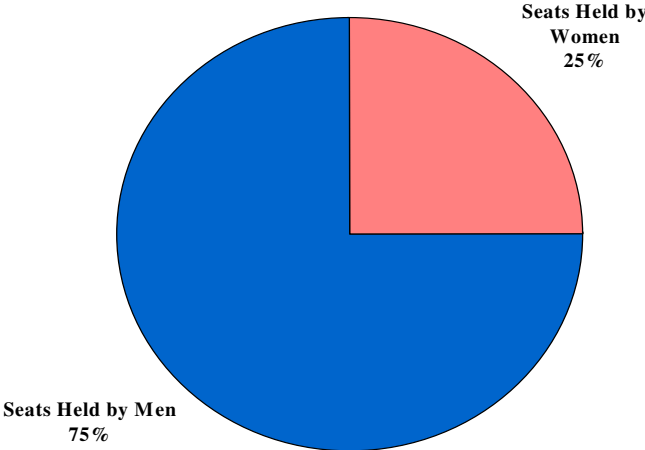


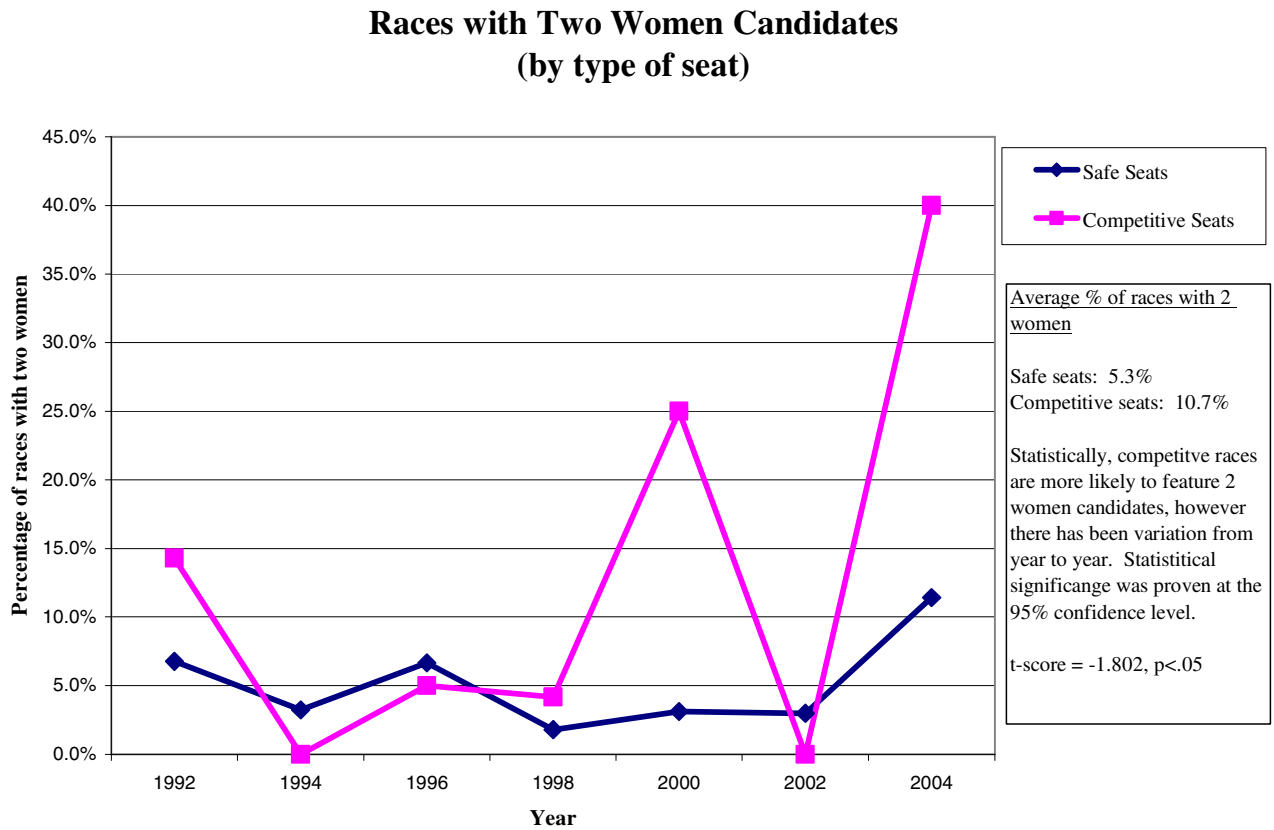
Figure J

Safe Seats (1992-2005)



As will be discussed in the paper, many have suggested that women might make better candidates in competitive state legislative races, particularly when the other candidate is a woman. I wondered if campaign and party strategists are more likely to recruit a woman to run in a tough race when they expect the other candidate to also be a woman. First I charted the number of races with two women candidates. As seen in Figure K, it appears that 2 women candidates have more frequently opposed each other in competitive districts versus safe districts. Testing for significance, I verified this theory (t-score: -1.802, $p < .05$). Although there has been some variation across years, women candidates are more likely to face other women in competitive races.

Figure K



The statistically significant results explained here will be used throughout the paper to support the original hypothesis and other conclusions. Key findings include:

- Democratic women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for expected wins or losses;
- Republican women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for expected wins;
- Republican women are more likely than Democratic women to run in races they are expected to lose;

- Women of both parties are more likely to win races for competitive assembly seats than races for safe assembly seats; therefore women are more likely to represent marginal districts in the assembly; and
- Competitive races are more likely than other races to have 2 women candidates.

Explanation and consequences of findings

Using the statistical findings above, interviews with legislators and consultants, and academic research, the following four sections explore the relevance of the hypothesis. What does it mean that women have been more likely to run for and hold competitive seats? The paper will first discuss why women run for competitive seats, considering their strengths and weaknesses as candidates and barriers to running for other types of seats. It will also consider how this discovery might impact women's electoral opportunities. The paper will use these findings to recommend methods for increasing the number of women elected to office. The next section will discuss how women representing competitive district operate in the legislature. This section will examine the types of bills these women introduce and support, the types of leadership positions they hold, and the expectations placed on them as officeholders. The final section will use these findings to make recommendations on how marginal women can strengthen their roles and bolster their priorities in the assembly.

Section I: Why women are more likely to run for competitive seats

Comments from interviewees, academic research, and my own observations have led me to form multiple conclusions about why women run for competitive seats. Some suggest that women, especially Republican women, may have few other options than to run for competitive seats. Other evidence indicates that parties actively recruit women to run for these seats. Additionally, most sources suggest that women might make better candidates in competitive races. While many of these conclusions are subjective, they have been supported repeatedly throughout the academic literature and by experts in both parties.

Theory 1: Women are shut out of safe seats by their parties and an "old boys network"

Women face many obstacles to winning their party primaries in safe districts. Multiple researchers have determined that women are more likely to seek and get elected to offices that are "less desirable" (Sanbonmatsu 795). Some academics attribute this to "increased competition among potential [male] candidates" for more desirable offices (Ibid.). The same literature suggests that in primaries for safe seats, "Democratic women in states with Democratic majority legislatures are less likely to receive the support of their party" (Ibid. 804). Other research suggests that in primaries, "female Republicans will have a more difficult time getting nominated" than Republican men (King and Matland 605). Many legislators with whom I spoke echoed these claims arguing two main theories. First, many suggested that an "old boys network" keeps women of both parties out of safe seats. Others suggested that Republican women in general have a hard time appealing to their own party's leaders and voters in contested primaries.

According to former assemblywoman Hannah-Beth Jackson, “the easy seats are locked up by the guys.” She explains that male office holders representing safe seats often hand pick their successors “‘here is my heir apparent’” (Interview). Assemblywoman Gloria Negrete McLeod agreed, “If you’ve got a male in a non-competitive seat, they will pass it off to someone else and a woman’s not likely to get in there” (Interview). Former assemblywoman Tricia Hunter said, “When it’s a safe seat I don’t think women are frequently in the inside network that propels them to the choice of party leadership” (Interview). Although she was not her party’s pick for the safe Republican seat for which she first ran, Hunter was able to sneak past her party’s designated candidate in an abrupt, unanticipated special election in 1989. However, Hunter faced continued challenges from a party that didn’t think she belonged in the seat.

Most of Hunter’s male Republican colleagues opposed her 1990 re-election effort. Several campaigned against her, writing checks to and walking precincts for her primary opponent. One colleague even sent a letter to powerful, conservative activist Gary Bauer recommending that Bauer direct anti-abortion groups to target Hunter and her female Republican colleague Sunny Mojonier. In the letter, he described Hunter “as a ‘pro-abortion feminist.’” (Lucas) After the author of the letter, assemblyman Bill Baker, apologized to the Republican caucus, he was forgiven without any retribution. (Ibid.) Although Hunter won that race, she lost her next one when, according to Hunter, “reapportionment happened” (Interview). Her district boundaries were redrawn with the consent of Republican leadership so that she could no longer win her seat. When Hunter ran for a competitive seat 12 years later, her party treated her differently. “In my last race the party cajoled me to run because it was a competitive seat. In a Republican seat I wouldn’t be the chosen candidate. They would have wanted someone more conservative. In 2004, leadership was able to bring everyone together; they came together strongly for me” (Ibid.). However, Hunter does not believe that her experiences in 2004 indicate that Republicans are more supportive of female candidates now than they were in the early 1990s. Rather, she suspects that the current Republican caucus in the assembly is a much more unified and pragmatic group than it used to be, more focused on winning than on ideology.

Hunter’s experiences illustrate the contention that women, particularly Republican women, are shut out of their party primaries in safe seats both by their party’s leadership and voters. David Niven surveyed “party chairs and female local legislators in four states” and “found that male party chairs do discriminate against women in their recruitment patterns. . . party leaders relate positively to those potential candidates seen as being similar to themselves.” Niven reports, “the ‘old boys network’ is still a powerful deterrent to women’s candidacies, since a predominantly male party elite is less likely to recognize the merits of a potential female candidate” (Swers 171). Republican party leaders might also recognize that their primary voters are less likely to support women candidates. “There is some indication that being female leads voters to assume a candidate is more liberal,” (King and Matland 598) an assumption that can easily knock a Republican woman out of her party primary. One survey gauged voter impressions of Republican candidates, identical except that one was male and the other female. Responses indicate that Republican voters were more likely to support the male candidate because he was assumed to be more conservative. “Whereas 42.7% of those who evaluated the female candidate said the conservative label fit her ‘very well,’ the equivalent response for the male candidate was 14% percentage points higher at 56.7%” (Ibid. 606). The researchers concluded that “to the

extent that conservatives are active in primaries, the impression that female Republicans are more liberal than otherwise identical male candidates, works against women trying to win votes in the Republican primaries” (Ibid.). Congressional election data from 1990-2002 supports these findings. “In 52.7% of Democratic primaries in open-seat districts, where a woman has run, the party’s voters have elected a female candidate. For the Republicans, on the other hand, women have won in only 38.9% of the districts where there was a woman running” (Ibid. 607).

Interviewees’ experiences also support these findings. Republican political consultant Chris Wideman stated that it is “out of the norm for [Republican] women to run for safe seats” (Interview). Another Republican consultant Steve Rogers argued that regardless of a candidate’s actual views, the perception that women are more liberal can work against Republican women running in more conservative districts. “I don’t think they’re more moderate at all; they’re just perceived that way.” In Rogers’s experience, this perception can be the death knell for Republican women in primary elections. “More than ever you’re going to have to be a conservative warrior to get out of these [Republican] primaries. I don’t know if women candidates can win safe Republican seats because they’ve been drawn so conservative.” He noted that “sometimes it can help” to have a woman representing the Republican party in a competitive race. Still, “If it’s a conservative seat, then I want to put a man in there” (Interview). Hunter notes that she has “had to take extra steps to earn Republican votes” especially from older voters. “In Republican primaries it was much harder for me to be credible” Hunter reported (Interview).

These findings suggest that one reason women are more likely to run for competitive seats is that they face both institutional and electoral barriers to running for safe seats. However, it appears that women have a somewhat easier time running for competitive seats. They face fewer institutional barriers and may even be recruited by their parties. Voters’ stereotypes about women candidates tend to benefit women who run for competitive seats, especially Republican women. Other factors like the issues of interest to women candidates and their personal styles might also make them better candidates for these seats. These factors are discussed below.

Theory 2: Political parties are more likely to recruit women to run for competitive seats

Political scientist Michele Swers surveyed decades of academic literature about women in politics and concluded that while parties did little to help women candidates in the past, more recently both parties have made “efforts to recruit, train, and fund women candidates” (170). Kira Sanbonmatsu says that in districts “where the office is more desirable [i.e. safe seats], the party role may be to referee political ambition rather than cultivate it, and the party may be less likely to seek out women candidates” (805). Conversely she argues that in districts “where it is difficult for the parties to find candidates, the parties may actively recruit women” (805). This tendency for parties to recruit women candidates for competitive races is reflected in the experience of some interviewees. However, the interviewees’ experiences vary.

Former assemblywoman Lynne Leach said that members of her party asked her to run for her competitive seat, although her gender might not have played a role. “I was the chair of the county Republican party. I didn’t get the feeling it was primarily because I was a woman. I had a track record and a high profile” (Interview). Republican campaign strategist Steve Rogers

says, “I don’t think we make an effort to recruit women. We represent lots of women but we don’t think about these things” (Interview). Other Republicans report that they actively seek opportunities to recruit women candidates to competitive races. Republican campaign consultant Chris Wideman shares a recruiting strategy that can pay double dividends to his party:

“In safe districts there is not a lot of need to recruit candidates. It’s harder to get people to run for competitive seats so we have to recruit. When you’re focusing resources on recruiting candidates, why not recruit a woman? It makes the Republican party look better, more diverse. We’re trying to reach out and recruit more women. The way you do it is get them to run in competitive districts” (Interview).

Democrats also recruit women to run for competitive seats. Local activists recruited assemblywoman Barbara Matthews to run in one of the most competitive districts in the state. She later heard that the assembly speaker’s top political aide was thrilled with the selection. “He was so excited that someone had found a woman to run. He thought [in order to win] it should be a woman” (Interview). Assemblywoman Nicole Parra was recruited by local Democratic leaders to run for office:⁵

“I never wanted to run. Never, never, never! I was 32 with \$60,000 in law school debt, was not married, had no children, and had never been elected. ‘I can’t run for office!’ I said. But Cal suggested it and gave me my first check. They [Democratic leaders] helped me with endorsements, fundraising, everything” (Interview).

Matthews and Parra were recruited to run for office in 2000 and 2002, respectively. Women elected to the assembly just a decade earlier had different experiences. Regarding her first race in 1992, former assemblywoman Julie Bornstein says, “I was definitely not recruited. The Democratic caucus was supporting a male candidate who moved into my district” (Interview). Bornstein’s former colleague Debra Bowen was also not recruited to run for her competitive seat that year. In fact, she says that the Democratic party virtually ignored her race until two to three weeks before the election. She might not have received even late assistance if she had not “had a champion” in legislator Richard Katz. Bowen reports that Katz convinced assembly speaker Willie Brown “to spend a little money to poll” (Interview). The poll results convinced Democratic leadership to put money into the district just in time to help her win. Former assemblywoman DeDe Alpert, who first ran in 1990, was not recruited for her competitive seat either. However, Alpert believes that around the time Bornstein, Bowen, and she were first running for office, the Democratic leadership in Sacramento began to realize “that women were attractive candidates.” She says that she later learned that in the early 1990s Brown commissioned a study to identify the ideal candidate profile for competitive districts such as hers. Like her, the “ideal candidate” was approximately 45 years old, a school board member or other local official, and, most importantly, female (Interview).

Brown’s conclusion that the “ideal candidate” for a competitive state legislative race would be female is supported by voluminous academic research, reams of election results, voter opinion

⁵ It should be noted that the key leader Parra credits with recruiting her is Congressman Cal Dooley for whom she worked for ten years.

polls, and the experiences of interviewees. As discussed below, it appears that many voters are more inclined to vote for women in these races. Evidence indicates that voters are willing to vote across party lines to support women candidates. Also, voters may be more inclined to support female candidates when they run for offices like the assembly that deal with issues voters associate with women.

Theory 3: Voters cross party lines to support women, which can provide the margin of victory needed to win a competitive race

The majority of interviewees reported benefiting from crossover voting, usually by women from outside of their party. Democrat Alpert says, “Republican women feel free to vote for me. [They] are more likely to vote for a Democratic woman than a Democratic man” (Interview). Former Democratic assemblywoman Susan Davis says that “there are some issues that women crossover on, certainly choice issues; women will consider all other issues.” Her successful campaign strategy has been to target Republican and independent women, visiting them at home to ask for their support (Interview). When former assemblywoman Debra Bowen first ran for a seat that had been a Republican stronghold, she too benefited from the willingness of Republican women to support her. “I had the year of the woman advantage” in 1992; “people were ready for a change” (Interview). Bowen benefited from the votes of Republican women again in 1998 when she ran for the state senate. Senate Republican leader Jim Brulte told her that 15% of Republican women they polled supported her and “no matter what we tell them we can’t shake them off” (Ibid.). Rogers notes that in coastal “target seats” like Bowen’s “the swing voters are Republican women, who are prone to defect, and decline to state [voters]. Swing voters are probably more likely to vote for a woman which can be a disadvantage to our side” when the Republican candidate is a man (Interview).

Republican women also benefit from crossover votes. Republican Hunter says she has always received crossover votes. “In the general elections it mattered that I was a woman [especially because I was] a moderate, pro-choice Republican.” (Interview). She cites the results of her 2004 campaign, when her vote tally was 10 points above Republican voter registration. She is not alone. In the aforementioned study of voter attitudes toward Republican legislative candidates who are identical except for their gender, researchers discovered significant benefits for female Republicans in general elections. The study was based on a 1993 poll of voters. All poll respondents were more likely to trust the fictional woman candidate and say she “shares my concerns” (King and Matland 601). This finding was biased heavily by Democrats who were 19% more likely to think that the female candidate shares their concerns (Republicans 3%, Independents 8%). Republicans were significantly less likely to classify the woman as a strong leader. Independent and Democratic voters were 10% more likely to vote for the Republican woman than for the Republican man. “There is, however, no advantage in terms of support among Republican respondents” (Ibid. 602). In fact, Republican voters were much less likely to support the Republican woman (GOP women were 10.5% less likely to support the Republican woman and GOP men were 13.6% less likely) (Ibid. 605). So while Republican women face significant barriers to winning their party primaries, it appears that they can use crossover votes to find success in general elections.

Theory 4: Gender stereotypes may predispose voters, especially women, to support female assembly candidates

Some academics suggest that “female candidates do indeed gain a strategic advantage when they target women’s or social groups and stress issues that voters associate favorably with female candidates. . . women who use these strategies have an 11% higher probability of winning than do other candidates” (Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 250). These same researchers claim that “women voters are more likely to vote for the candidate perceived to have the ‘kinder and gentler’ policy stance. Female candidates, regardless of their position on compassion issues are often seen as more sympathetic to these causes” (Ibid. 246). Therefore, “being a female candidate can be an asset. When women choose to capitalize on gender stereotypes by focusing on issues that are favorably associated with women candidates and targeting women or other social groups, they improve their prospects of electoral success” (Ibid. 251)

These findings suggest that Republican women who campaign on issues of importance to women voters might benefit at the ballot box regardless of how they vote once elected. However, some reject this strategy. Republican consultant Wideman says that women candidates should not pander to women’s groups or focus on traditional women’s issues and causes. “Focus groups tell us that nobody cares about the fact that there aren’t more women in the legislature. . . Republican women need to talk about our issues like taxes; otherwise they might turn off men” (Interview).

Even if one argues that women candidates should not focus on women’s issues, multitudes of studies make it difficult to deny that voters associate certain issues with women candidates. According to two nationwide polls, “Male candidates are considered better able to deal with foreign policy, the economy, defense spending, arms control, foreign trade, and farm issues; female candidates are considered better able to deal with day care, poverty, education, health care, civil rights, drug abuse, and the environment” (Kahn 9). These stereotypes might have significant positive ramifications for women legislative candidates, at least those running for state offices. Since many of the issues associated with women are germane to state government, voters might assume that women candidates are better equipped than men to serve them in the state legislature. Kahn argues that the relevant issues that dominate state races are better aligned with women’s stereotypical strengths. This advantage might propel a female candidate toward victory in a competitive assembly race. However, Kahn also posits that the issues in federal campaigns “tend to correspond to [women’s] perceived weaknesses,” indicating that women termed out of the assembly might have less luck than their male colleagues moving on to Congress (Kahn 14).

Theory 5: For various reasons, women make better candidates in competitive races

Interviewees offered a multitude of somewhat less quantifiable reasons that women might make better candidates in competitive assembly races, further explaining why they are more likely to run for these seats. One theory is that women’s traditional fundraising disadvantage disappears in competitive races. Others argue that women are less vulnerable to the negative campaign tactics that are common in competitive races. Some claim that women put more effort into their campaigns than do male candidates. Several women say that female candidates have more

relevant experience than male candidates. Others are convinced that personal characteristics common among women make them better candidates in competitive races. Many of these theories are supported by academics and other personal sources.

Myriad academic studies indicate that women candidates are less successful fundraisers than their male counterparts. To the contrary, several interviewees indicated that campaign donations flow to women candidates in competitive races with much less effort and considerably more equality (Alpert, Bowen, Davis, Matthews, and Parra interviews). Arguing that safe members have a harder time convincing contributors to donate to them, Democrat Bowen asked “What are you going to say if you’re [as safe as] Hilda Solis [who represents a Congressional district with a large Democratic majority]? It was easier for me to talk with crossover sources of funds” (Interview). If women can anticipate fewer obstacles to raising campaign donations when running for competitive seats, it stands to reason that they should be more inclined to run in these districts. Further, their increased capacity to raise funds makes them better candidates for these seats.

Multiple interviewees suggest that women candidates are at an advantage when running against men because “it is hard for men to attack women” (Alpert interview). Wideman agrees, “It’s hard to go negative and not seem like you’re mean-spirited. There’s this feeling out there that men should leave the women alone. You can’t be as over the top. You don’t [want] to be perceived as a schoolyard bully” (Interview). Matthews notes that “men are less comfortable being nasty to a woman.” In public her male opponents will preface their criticisms of her with “Mrs. Matthews is a nice lady” (Interview). Not all female candidates face deferential male opponents, however. In her 2004 re-election campaign Nicole Parra was repeatedly muddied with nasty attacks from her male opponent. Among other dubious claims, he repeatedly questioned what he called her “alternative lifestyle,” a thinly veiled and false attempt to encourage morally conservative Catholic voters that she is a lesbian (Interview). Julie Bornstein says that the man who unseated her “ran a 100% negative campaign” which never backfired on him (Interview). She points out that her colleagues Betty Karnette and Margaret Snyder also lost their re-election bids in 1994, a notoriously bitter election year, to men who launched significant attack campaigns against them. While Parra’s and Bornstein’s experiences demonstrate that women are subject to at least some negative campaigning from male candidates, it appears that women candidates are less vulnerable to it than men.

Recent academic work suggests that women candidates “run harder” than men do, putting more time and effort into their campaigns (De Souza and Foerstel 59). Many interviewees agree. Former assemblywoman Jackson says “You’ve got to work hard” to win a competitive seat and since women are generally willing to do so, “they tend to win” (Interview). Davis says women candidates don’t take anything for granted. “Women don’t assume people are going to think they are wonderful just because they are standing up there in front of them. Women work hard to find a lot of different ways to appeal to people” (Interview). “From my experience,” says Republican Lynne Leach, “women get out there and work hard. They are determined to be successful” (Interview).

Others claim that women candidates, who tend to run for office later in life, have more life experiences to draw upon and are less likely to be motivated by blind ambition. Leach says,

“Young men run in their early 30s without track records. The vast majority of women candidates have a track record, have acquitted themselves, have raised a family” (Interview). Assemblywoman Gloria Negrete McLeod discussed the women with whom she serves, “We have all raised our families and wanted to be public servants. We’re more seasoned. Generally speaking for women it’s a public service thing. They don’t come in here like a 30-year-old man who sees this as Point A on his way to Point B and Point C” (Interview). Assemblywoman Carol Liu agrees, “Generally because we are older when we run, we are more purposeful in trying to make a difference” (Interview).

Others note personal qualities about women that tend to make them more attractive to voters. Parra says that “women build coalitions better; they are more unifying” (Interview). There is evidence that “voters view women candidates as more compassionate and willing to compromise” (Swers 169). Women are also more likely “to be relationship oriented and skilled in the socioemotional work of caregiving” (Rosenthal 26). Steve Rogers tells of former Republican assembly candidate Julie Alban who seemed to personify the positive personality traits commonly associated with women. In 1998, Alban ran against a Democratic man for an open seat in a competitive district. The district had a six point Democratic voter registration advantage, but in part due to Alban’s attractiveness as a candidate, it was ranked as a “Toss Up” by *California Journal*. Rogers, who spent several weeks working on Alban’s campaign, credited her success to personal attributes, “people would do anything for her.” Although many insiders like Rogers assumed that Democrats would probably win the seat, he said “she made it competitive.” According to Rogers, Alban attracted as many as 200-300 Republican volunteers a day to walk precincts, a highly unusual number for a Republican assembly race. “I’ve never seen such a Republican turnout of volunteers” (Interview). In a hugely successful year for Democrats, in which they increased their share of assembly seats from 44 to 48, Republican Alban ultimately lost her race. However, it appears that she convinced at least some Democratic and independent voters in her district to buck the statewide trend and vote Republican; she lost by only 2.7% of the vote.

Through academic research and anecdotal accounts we can see a clear thesis develop: women have several advantages in general elections for the state assembly. Voters have demonstrated a willingness to cross party lines to support women; female voters in particular share an affinity for candidates of their gender; voters are more inclined to assume women candidates are skilled at the issues aligned with state legislative work; and myriad personal qualities commonly found in women benefit them in assembly campaigns. One unmistakable reason why women are more likely to run for competitive assembly seats is because they have the capacity to be better candidates for these races.

Findings presented here indicate that women are more likely to run for competitive seats than safe seats for the following reasons:

1. Women face barriers to seeking safe seats, specifically the effects of an “old boys network” and resistance from their own parties to support them in primary races for safe seats (especially true for Republican women);
2. Political parties are more likely to recruit women to run for competitive seats; and

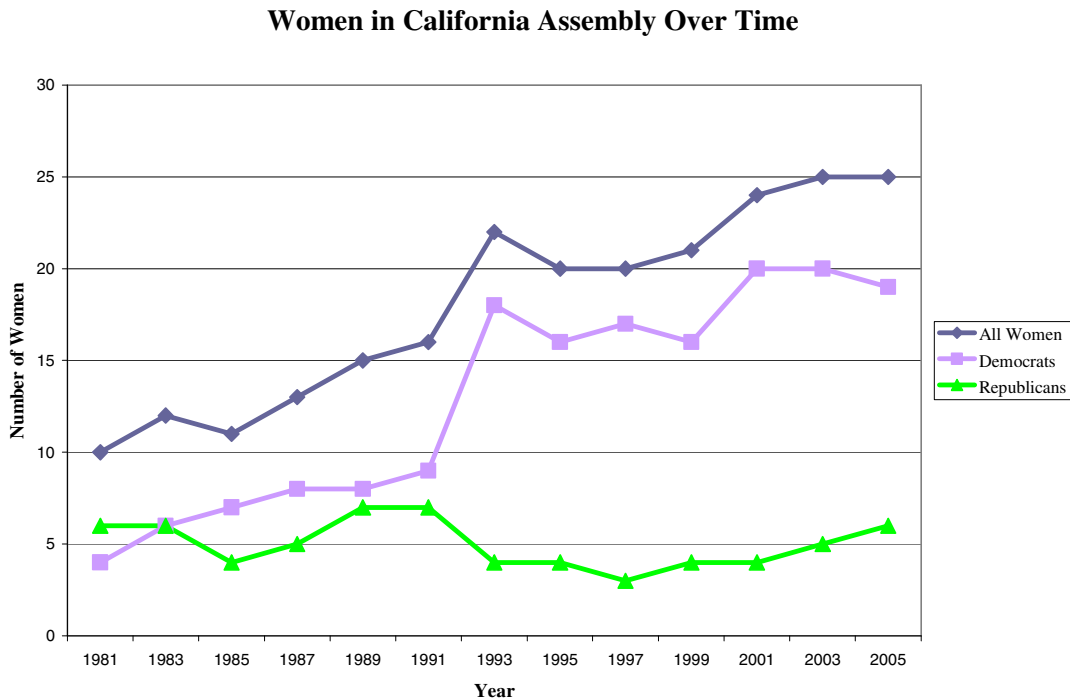
3. Women make better candidates by many measures including their ability to earn crossover votes and their capacity to capitalize on gender stereotypes.

Academics warn that placing a woman in a competitive race is not a guaranteed formula for success. “The impact of the candidate’s sex may rise or fall based on how ‘gendered’ the salient issues are in the election. . . With such great diversity and many ‘moving parts’ it can be difficult to identify exactly when female candidates are advantaged or disadvantaged and how” (King and Matland 598). Still, it is clear that women hold some advantages as candidates and could benefit from capitalizing on them. In order to reduce the barriers keeping women from expanding their electoral opportunities and underscore the natural advantages women candidates have, the following paragraphs will discuss the implications of this section’s findings and suggest ways to increase women’s electoral success.

Section II: Implications and recommendations for increasing women’s electoral opportunities

In 2005 women comprise a mere 31% of the state assembly. Democratic women hold 40% of their party’s seats and Republican women hold 19% of theirs. Although the number of women in the assembly climbed throughout the 1980s, its ascent slowed significantly after 1992, the so-called “year of the woman.” In recent years, the number of women in the legislature seems to have plateaued. See Figure L below (Center for American Women in Politics).

Figure L



Assuming gender parity among elected office holders is desirable, we should consider what the findings in this paper suggest about increasing the number of women office holders.

Implication 1: An increase in the number of competitive seats would likely benefit women

One possible explanation for the lack of growth in the number of women elected to the assembly is that there are now many fewer competitive seats than in previous years. In 1992, *California Journal* ranked 22 seats as competitive. In 2004 it ranked only nine as competitive and noted that even this was quite a stretch.⁶ Indeed, both parties held onto every single seat they had occupied in the prior term. Assemblywoman Carol Liu says, “there really aren’t any more competitive seats. Everyone is safe. I think women could benefit from more competitive seats if the lines were redrawn. I support redrawing the lines. I trust the voters to pick the best candidate” (Interview). Liu’s sentiment seems to be reflected in the widespread public support for efforts to change the redistricting process. Most such proposals, such as Proposition 77 which will appear on the November 2005 ballot, would take redistricting out of the hands of legislators. One of the major goals of Proposition 77 and other redistricting reform proposals is to make legislative seats more competitive. Since women are more likely to run for competitive assembly seats and they tend to be strong candidates in these races, a new, more competitive redistricting plan would allow women more and better opportunities to run for office.

In the past, women have not been seriously involved in the redistricting process. The male legislators intimately involved with drawing district lines have had the opportunity to draw districts for themselves, their successors, and political cronies. In recent decades, some female legislators have argued loudly that they were discriminated against in a redistricting process that favors men. Unfortunately these complaints were lodged too late to make a significant difference.

Ethnic and other interest groups have advocated redistricting plans that benefit their members; women’s organizations have submitted no similar plans. It is easy to see why. Unlike members of ethnic groups who tend to cluster geographically, women tend to live with men. It seems counter-intuitive to imagine a district with a heavy imbalance of female to male voters. However, an argument could be made that a few districts could be drawn so that women hold a sizable majority of the voting population. Perhaps areas with high concentrations of single mothers, elderly people, or even women’s college students could comprise a handful of districts in which women voters outnumber men by five or more percentage points. Such a change could yield a few districts that are friendly campaign grounds for women candidates. Like ethnic-majority districts ordered and protected by the Voting Rights Act and subsequent court rulings, these female-majority districts could be justified legally as a necessary tactic to ensure that an underrepresented group can elect its own to the statehouse and Congress. However, if implemented unfairly, efforts to create woman-majority seats could rely on some of the same undesirable gerrymandering tactics that are the impetus for reform.

Perhaps the best way to secure more seats for women through the redistricting process is to ensure that future redistricting plans will have more competitive seats. Because such plans could favor women candidates, female legislators and women’s political organizations should take an active role in the redistricting process and in efforts to reform that process.

⁶ Ten of the 18 major party candidates running for these competitive seats in the 2004 general election were women. Female candidates won six of these nine seats. Where 55.5% of the candidates for competitive seats were women, only 33% of all major party candidates were women in 2004 assembly races.

Implication 2: The Republican party could benefit from helping more women win marginal seats

As noted above, the California Republican party has not traditionally supported women candidates in party primaries for safe assembly seats. Compared to Democrats, they have also had far fewer women represent their party in general elections for competitive seats.⁷ One of the most significant ways to increase the number of women elected to the assembly, while also addressing the severely low numbers of female Republicans elected, is for the Republican party to promote more women candidates in marginal districts. Academics agree, suggesting that because voters assume female candidates to be more liberal, Republicans should take advantage of the crossover votes Republican women can earn from Democrats and Independents (King and Matland 605, Herrenson, Lay and Stokes 245). The benefits to the Republican party are obvious. When asked if there is an advantage to running Republican women in competitive seats, Chris Wideman said “Absolutely. It helps at a number of levels. You’re not appealing to a good part of your electorate when all your candidates are old, bald white men. Women candidates can be our spokespeople. Women are more likely to hear our message [through women candidates]” (Interview). Wideman suggests another potential benefit, “I think it helps the party as a whole because the institutional donors want to see more women in office” (Ibid.). By helping women candidates win their party primaries and become their party’s nominees for competitive assembly seats, the Republican party can become more diverse, win more votes, broaden women’s support for the party, and satisfy party donors. Also, since women candidates have an advantage in competitive general elections, the Republican party will likely gain seats in the assembly by following this strategy. Republican women currently serving in the assembly should bolster these efforts by helping to recruit and raise money for Republican women to run in competitive seats. As discussed in the following sections, Republican assemblymembers might gain the most from an increase in their population.

Implication 3: The Democratic party could benefit from backing more women in safe districts

Conversely, it would behoove the Democratic party to concentrate on recruiting more women and supporting them to run for safe seats. Over the last seven election cycles, Democratic women have comprised half of the party’s candidates for competitive seats. However, they are only a third of the candidates in safe districts. For Democratic women this means they have to work considerably harder in their general election campaigns with less of a guarantee that they will be elected to office. As we will examine in the next section, representing a competitive district also means that, once elected, a woman is limited in certain ways as a legislator. Democratic women should continue to utilize the advantages they have in competitive races, but they should also seek additional seats in safe districts. Women, who hold significant power, at least symbolically, in the Democratic party should use their clout to argue for greater recruitment efforts and support of women in party primaries. It appeared that the party was committed to these goals a decade ago. But as the “year of the woman” becomes a more distant memory, some women are concerned that current party leaders have become complacent. Former assemblywoman Julie Bornstein who is satisfied with the support she received from Democratic leaders in her 1992 and 1994 campaigns thinks, “they might be less likely to help women now. They probably aren’t even aware of it, but I think the current party leadership is more likely to

⁷ In the seven general elections between 1992 and 2004, 28 Republican women ran for competitive assembly seats, as opposed to 61 Democratic women.

help men who they know than women they don't" (Interview). Considering the multitude of Democratic interviewees who complained about a "good old boys network" locking women out of safe seats, it appears that the California Democratic party should re-evaluate its efforts to elect women to office. Current Democratic women officeholders and women's organizations associated with the party should urge party leaders to work harder to help women win more safe seats. They should also engage in their own efforts to recruit, groom, and help fund Democratic women in safe seats.

Implication 4: Parties benefit from running female candidates in competitive races, regardless of opponents' gender; they gain advantage against male candidates and neutralize the advantage of female opponents

As argued above, political parties can benefit from capitalizing on the many advantages female candidates enjoy over male opponents in competitive assembly races. Both parties can also benefit from running a female candidate against a woman opponent. In these races the gender advantage is usually neutralized, a boon to the party that would have otherwise run a male candidate. As our statistical analysis demonstrated, competitive races over the last 12 years have been more likely to feature two women candidates (10.7% of competitive races vs. 5.3% of races for safe seats). In 2004, 40% of competitive races featured two women candidates. This might indicate that parties are beginning to recognize that they can eliminate their female opponent's gender advantage by running another woman against her.

If this argument seems cynical, it should be examined for its potential benefit to women interested in politics. Under this strategy parties would recruit more women to run for office and support them in their elections. If both major party candidates for assembly are women, almost certainly a woman is going to win the seat. The woman who loses will have had the opportunity to develop the network and skills necessary to run successfully for the same or other offices in the future. One potential problem with the strategy is that it could dilute the money and volunteer support available to women candidates of a particular party while not increasing the numbers of women elected to office. For instance, let us assume a political action committee supporting Republican women were to have a choice between supporting 10 women whom they knew would be elected to safe seats or 15 women, 5 of whom were running for safe seats and 10 whose competitive races were too close to call. They could conceivably spend at least 50% more in campaign contributions (and maybe considerably more as competitive candidates need more money to win). Even then, they might end up seeing fewer than 10 Republican women elected to office. While this concern might be valid, it is not likely in the current context. As discussed above, women don't tend to hold a monopoly on a large number of safe seats, so the former "choice" does not appear to be an option. If it becomes one, this strategy can be re-evaluated. Until then, women and their parties will benefit when more women are recruited to run for office, if only to neutralize the gender of their opponent.

Implication 5: Women's electoral futures might be limited if they start in competitive seats (results unclear)

Finally, we should consider the effect representing a competitive district might have on assemblywomen's electoral futures. Hannah-Beth Jackson thinks it is difficult to run statewide

after representing a competitive assembly district because members like her have to develop a legislative record based on “local issues instead of appealing to the state as a whole” (Interview). Assemblywoman Parra says, “It’s hard to run statewide from the [Central] Valley.” Referring to former Fresno assembly speaker turned lieutenant governor Cruz Bustamante, she said, “Cruz became a liberal. You have to change who you are to run statewide.” She noted that she might be interested in continuing to represent her district in the state Senate and Congress (Interview). Tricia Hunter also reveals that Republican women who make good candidates in competitive races because they are more moderate might have trouble running for statewide office, “I don’t think I could get through a contentious primary. Especially as notorious as I am [for being pro-choice], I would bring out the fringe against me.” Still, Hunter admits that she has considered running for Congress (Interview). Two other interviewees view their experience running in competitive districts as beneficial when they wanted to run for other offices. Susan Davis, who unseated a congressional incumbent in 1998, says it helped that she had “already appealed to Republican women” (Interview). Debra Bowen, who currently serves in the state senate and is planning a bid for Secretary of State in 2006 says, “the experience of running in a competitive district gives me the confidence to run statewide” (Gledhill, Bowen). The experiences of these women vary significantly. Without further research, it is unclear whether the tendency for women to run for competitive districts helps or hinders them when they seek other offices.

Using the research explaining why women are more likely to run for competitive assembly seats, this paper prescribes a number of methods to remedy the under-representation of women in the state assembly. Women legislators and feminist political advocates should work with party leadership to develop and advocate a redistricting plan that creates additional competitive seats and that considers women’s electoral opportunities. The Republican party should recruit more women to run for competitive seats and should assist them in winning their primary and general elections. Current Republican assemblywomen should contribute to this effort by training and fundraising for these candidates. The Democratic party should make a more concerted effort to help women win primary elections for safe assembly seats. Democratic women legislators and liberal women’s activist groups should compel party leaders to meet this goal and should engage in their own efforts to help elect women to safe seats. In the short term, both parties should attempt to recruit more women to run for competitive seats, if only to neutralize the gender advantage of the other party. This strategy should be re-evaluated after more women have been elected to office. Since we cannot assess at this time whether competitive districts hinder their occupants from running for higher offices, this might be an area for further research. Both political parties and advocates for electing more women to office stand to benefit from the implications of our statistical analysis, review of academic literature, and interviews. Key implications and recommendations include:

- 1) A new redistricting plan that includes more competitive assembly districts could result in an increase in the number of women in the assembly;
- 2) Republicans would likely gain assembly seats AND increase the number of women they elect by recruiting and supporting more women to run for competitive assembly seats;
- 3) Democrats could increase the number of women they elect by recruiting and supporting more women to run for safe Democratic assembly seats; and

- 4) Both parties could benefit from backing women candidates for competitive seats, regardless of the gender of their opponents.

Section III: Legislative experiences of women who represent competitive districts

As detailed statistically above, women are more likely to win competitive seats in the state assembly than seats that are safe for their party. Because women disproportionately hold competitive seats -- those that are more challenging to represent and often preclude one from obtaining leadership posts -- their legislative experiences are different from those of men. The following section relies heavily on the experiences of the twelve current and former assemblywoman interviewed for this paper to illustrate how women in marginal districts legislate. The women explain how voting on legislation is more challenging due to the nature of their districts, but that unlike their colleagues in safe seats, they often benefit from the freedom to vote contrary to party recommendations. They report reduced opportunities to introduce sweeping or revolutionary legislation but more assistance crafting a well-balanced bill package that serves their district well. Most state that they cannot be considered for leadership positions within the legislature although many report satisfaction with their roles as committee chairs. They seem to express pride in their assessment of women's leadership styles and report that as marginal members they have many opportunities to demonstrate those qualities. They are resigned to working harder than many of their colleagues who do not have to put in as much time to keep their constituents happy. Their experiences reveal that women representing competitive districts do indeed legislate differently from assemblymembers in safe seats.

Finding 1: They have more latitude to "vote their districts" than with their parties; they face more scrutiny and pressure from opponents and interest groups

When asked how their voting records might differ from their colleagues, most interviewees gave the same basic response, "I vote my district" (Alpert, Bornstein, Bowen, Davis, Hunter, Parra). They note the importance of being "responsive to your constituency" over one's caucus (Davis). Karnette reports that "Democratic leadership is pretty kind; they don't punish you much" when you can't vote the way they want (Interview). Similarly, Lynne Leach reports that because of the competitive nature of her district, Republican leaders "gave me some latitude. I was given the green light to follow my conscious" (Interview).

When asked if she ever feels pressured to vote a certain way, Barbara Matthews responded, "No, it's almost the opposite. Because of my district I'm not going to get pressured [by leadership and lobbyists]." She recalls in her first month of office when she bucked party leadership, refusing to vote for its remedy to California's 2001 energy crisis. She faced intense lobbying efforts that included a phone call from U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein. The lobbying efforts ended at 3:30 in the morning when Democratic leadership realized she wasn't going to budge. Although rumors circulated at the time that the new member would be sharply punished for abandoning her caucus, she says she never faced any repercussions. She retained her new position as Chair of the Agriculture committee and continues to vote her conscience (Interview).

Nicole Parra reports that the Democratic caucus has actually pressured her to vote against her party when they think such a vote will help her retain her ultra-competitive seat. In 2003 when the contentious immigrant driver's license law was being considered, Democrats warned that:

“This would be the issue that would make me lose [re-election]. I said ‘Why are we here? If I will lose, that’s OK. [The bill’s author] Gil Cedillo told me, ‘I’ve never been so proud of anyone.’ For a competitive member, I refuse to follow leadership’s advice. I want to serve my district. There hasn’t been a vote I’ve taken that I didn’t think represented my district” (Interview).

Susan Davis who reports she “was given more freedom to vote the way I needed to because of my district,” claims that she voted against her caucus “about one quarter of the time.” She says she also benefited when safe members were being “stubborn” and wouldn’t vote for a bill supported by leadership. “In that case a marginal member can be the nice guy and take the vote leadership needs” (Interview).

However, the freedom reported by several members is often only one side of a double-edged sword. Several interviewees understand what Julie Bornstein means when she says, “I had to be very careful in my voting” (Interview). Debra Bowen reports “I had a minder in the Republican caucus” who tracked her votes. “I was very conscious of what I was doing” (Interview). Other members report worrying about how certain votes would be received in their districts. When taking a risky vote, Negrete McLeod says, “every once in awhile you go ‘what the heck am I doing?’ Maybe it won’t play well in my district but it’s a good choice for the state of California.” She references the highly controversial immigrant driver’s license bill for which she voted, “70% of the state abhorred it and it was not playing well in my district, [but it was a] good idea on a policy level” (Interview). Although Republicans threatened to use the vote to challenge her the following fall, she easily retained her seat (Secretary of State). Carol Liu says that, “My staff really watched my voting record very carefully. I think there were two handfuls of times when I said ‘I’m not going to do that,’” referring to conflicting requests from party leadership and her cautious staff. For instance, she was one of only two Democrats in the legislature to oppose the publicly unpopular immigrant driver’s license bill when both houses passed it in 2003. Conversely, to the consternation of many religious conservatives in her district who “would call and say they were praying for me” she joined other Democrats in supporting sweeping gay rights legislation. On one major gay rights bill in 2004, Liu says, “We [marginal members] all held hands, did a Thelma and Louise and jumped off the ridge together” (Interview).

Many interviewees report that like their party’s leadership, most lobbyists understand they have to vote somewhat differently from other members because of their competitive seats. However, for Democrats, organized labor appears to be an exception. While Matthews reports that “labor understands my position and appreciates it when I take tough votes” on their behalf, other members share different experiences (Interview). Jackson says, “Labor thought I was going to be an automatic vote for them. They just had to learn that I was going to vote the way I think is right” (Interview). Karnette says that most of the interest groups “don’t give me a hard time” for not voting the way they want. Education groups, attorneys, and other Democratic donors “understand it, but labor unions don’t; they can be tough. They have a reputation for wanting

you to vote for every single bill” (Interview). In a widely reported incident, a lobbyist for the United Farm Workers loudly berated Negrete McLeod’s chief of staff just outside of the assembly chamber when he learned the assemblywoman would not be supporting his union’s bill. However, Negrete McLeod reports that the threats were idle and actually bolstered her public image when she refused to change her position, “It affected me none on legislation. In fact, it make me look stronger”(Interview).

Members who represent competitive districts find that their legislative records are more heavily scrutinized and they occasionally are challenged by colleagues or interest groups because of controversial votes. However, most seem to appreciate having the freedom to “vote their districts.” Matthews summarizes the cost and benefit of that freedom, explaining that it can be more challenging personally because unlike many of her colleagues she must take time to “see both sides.” While other members just take cues from their party, Matthews says she has “to read everything myself” and develop her own opinions, which she says can be difficult and very time consuming. However, she reports a clear advantage to not being expected to vote with leadership, “I’m a hero in my district from not voting the party line; you get accolades for that” (Interview).

Finding 2: They have less freedom or time to carry sweeping legislation, but receive more assistance developing their bill packages

Hannah-Beth Jackson says that the impact of her competitive district didn’t register as much in the votes she took “but in the legislation I authored. The most daring legislation comes from people who are in safe districts because their districts support it” (Interview). Gloria Negrete McLeod agrees noting that members in safer districts introduce “big, revolutionary bills. We don’t do legislation like that” (Interview). When asked about the bills they have introduced in the assembly, most members echoed Nicole Parra’s sentiment “I’m just representing my district” (Interview). Hannah Beth Jackson confirms, “All of the legislation I did had some statewide significance but it also had to be something my district was interested in” (Interview). In addition to the desire to reflect the concerns of their districts, Jackson identifies another reason that competitive members rarely introduce sweeping legislation. She argues that marginal members are often too busy providing constituent services to manage highly demanding bills, “I had to put in an enormous amount of time in my district which left no time for tough legislation” (Ibid.).

While interviewees admit that they do not have the flexibility to introduce big bills, they do have at least one advantage when forming their bill packages, assistance from leadership. Like DeDe Alpert who reports that the assembly speaker’s office helped her form a diverse bill package, many marginal members receive leadership’s help crafting their bills (Interview). The caucuses routinely develop bills likely to raise the author’s public profile or make a member look attractive in the next election’s campaign advertisements. These bills are often reserved for legislators representing competitive districts in order to help those members boost their re-election efforts. Sometimes, the members are not even required to “do the legwork” on the bills; the speaker might ensure smooth passage for such a bill, at least through enough procedural hoops that the member can declare some victory. Leadership also helps marginal members round out their bill packages. For instance, a member might report to the speaker’s office that

she doesn't have any bills that would benefit or interest elderly people. If it is clear that the member will need the votes of senior citizens to be re-elected, the speaker's office will undoubtedly tap resources to find a good "seniors bill" for her to carry. Leadership staff also provides more basic legislative assistance to competitive members, especially in their first terms, such as taking extra time to teach them and their staffs how to create diverse and attractive bill packages.⁸

Finding 3: They have fewer opportunities to hold leadership positions

Perhaps the greatest challenges to the success of women representing competitive assembly districts is that they are usually denied the opportunity to hold the body's highest leadership positions. Studies show that "the power of legislative leaders to set and carry out the legislative agenda" is significantly increased in states with term limits, like California (Little, Dunn, and Deen 30). Because legislative leaders have a "disproportionate effect" on policy objectives, budget priorities, redistricting, and "campaign efforts," it is important for women to participate fully in leadership (Ibid. 31). Unfortunately, women do not have a history of holding many significant leadership positions in California's assembly. Worse, because women members are more likely to hold competitive seats, future prospects are not strong.

Most interviewees hold opinions similar to DeDe Alpert's: when you represent a marginal district, you are "kept from being Democratic majority leader; partisan roles don't suit a person in a marginal district" (Interview). Liu notes that marginal members cannot assume leadership positions because their re-elections are not guaranteed, "They need a team that is consistent" (Interview). This might be a lesson Democrats learned in 1994 when their presumed future speaker lost her re-election. Julie Bornstein so impressed her Sacramento colleagues that just a few months into her first term veteran legislators began to encourage her to run for speaker after Willie Brown termed out. When they approached speaker Brown to recommend he support Bornstein, his first concern was that "she's not in a safe district." Bornstein notes that the competitive nature of her district worried Brown but "none of my colleagues ever brought it up" (Interview). Those concerns seemed to vanish as *California Journal* named her "Rookie of the Year" and Brown appointed her Democratic caucus chair, only the second woman ever to hold the post. She appeared to be the leading candidate for speaker in the next term. "Others were interested" in campaigning for the position, "but I probably had the votes. People felt the time had come" for a woman speaker (Interview). To the surprise of perhaps all but Willie Brown, Bornstein lost her re-election to a second term and would not become speaker.

Weaned on cautionary tales such as Bornstein's most legislators do not consider marginal members good candidates for leadership. Not only can they lose their elections, but they also are not reliable votes for leadership priorities, setting a poor precedent for other members to follow. Because of her close relationship with speaker Fabian Nunez, Nicole Parra says she has "been offered positions as majority leader or assistant majority leader but I don't feel those are right for my district. I can't count the votes of other Democrats if I can't count my own" (Interview). Lynne Leach also reports that her desires to hold an assembly leadership position were not threatened by the competitive nature of her district. However, a year after she was named

⁸ With the exception of Alpert's quote, this paragraph is based on my own experiences working for the state assembly.

Republican caucus chair, she opted out of the position to “focus more on my constituents” (Interview). While Bornstein, Parra and Leach report some opportunities for leadership, most interviewees say they are not in the position to seek leadership posts.

While leadership positions are not conventionally available to marginal members, many report satisfaction with the alternative, committee chairs. Bowen says, “I was not particularly interested in moving into a caucus leadership position. I chaired the natural resources committee and my district was environmentally oriented” (Interview). Parra dismisses any frustration over her inability to assume a leadership post, “I’ve been given good committee assignments” (Interview). However, scholar Cindy Simon Rosenthal cautions that “committee work is the middle management level of legislative leadership” (10). When marginal women serve as committee chairs, they have the power to affect specific policy areas, but they still miss the opportunity to access the far-reaching, multi-issue power of a speaker, minority leader or other legislative leader.

Finding 4: Leadership traits commonly associated with women make them better suited to represent competitive districts

The experiences of several interviewees have persuaded them to believe that women might be better suited to represent competitive districts because of the way women tend to legislate, particularly if holding a marginal seat. Lynne Leach instructs that marginal members must “really work the district” making special efforts to develop relationships with constituents. From her own experiences, Leach says “I see that women are more geared to that whereas men are more into the political tug of the legislative process. Most women are more constituent oriented” (Interview). Susan Davis says that when one represents a competitive district she needs to work with and listen to people from the opposite party. You have to “be open to different points of view” (Interview). Rosenthal argues that women are more inclined to follow Davis’ advice, “women adopt leadership styles closer to an integrative style: sharing power and empowering others, being noncompetitive and inclusive, seeking consensus and mutuality in relationships, and inviting participation rather than imposing dominance” (5). Interviewees agree. Alpert calls women “consensus builders” (Interview). Bornstein reflects on her women colleagues as “more collaborative and well suited to achieve compromise among competing interests” (Interview). Liu says women are “willing to listen to both sides. They are not as much ideologues and hard liners as the guys” (Interview). Parra agrees, “we negotiate differently. We’re less like, ‘it’s my way or the highway’” (Interview). As discussed in a previous section, another typical female trait aligns well with the needs of a competitive district: women’s commitment to hard work. Karnette claims that “women are more willing to do the grunt work” involved with serving constituents (Interview). Matthews says “the difference between districts is that it is really easy to represent a safe district; you don’t have to do anything. It’s not that men don’t want to do anything, but a lot of women are more willing to work hard. They’re used to it because women have had to work harder to get ahead” (Interview). With the exception of one interviewee (Hunter), all other current and former assemblywoman state that personal characteristics common among women often make them better suited to represent competitive districts in the legislature.

From their experiences voting on and introducing bills to the leadership positions they hold and the personal qualities they bring to office, the current and former assemblywomen interviewed for this project demonstrate that women representing competitive districts legislate differently from both their male colleagues and women representing safe seats. These findings about women representing competitive districts include the following:

- 1) They are freer to vote independent of their parties, but their voting records are subject to greater scrutiny and pressure from opponents and interest groups;
- 2) They are less likely to author major legislation, but they receive more help developing their legislation than do safer members;
- 3) They are less likely to hold top leadership posts but no less likely to chair committees; any
- 4) Personal characteristics common among them predispose them to representing marginal districts effectively.

Many of these differences are positive and require no remedy. However, some consequences of these findings restrict the ability of marginal women to realize the full potential of their legislative positions. The next section discusses these consequences and recommends ways that marginal assemblywomen might mitigate them.

Section IV: Implications and recommendations for strengthening women's roles in the assembly

The experiences of assemblywomen from competitive districts reveal one major barrier to their achievement of additional success: the limited opportunities they have to hold key leadership positions. As reported here, they have less time to focus on leadership politics because they must concentrate on the needs of their district and constituents. Hannah-Beth Jackson stressed that when one represents a competitive district “it is very important that you’re at all the events, that you be responsive, be very accessible to your constituents” (Interview).⁹ More importantly, marginal women are usually restricted from holding legislative leadership positions because conventional wisdom informs legislators that only safe members should lead their caucuses. This seriously threatens the ability of women from competitive districts to influence public policy in California.

Most interviewees clearly report that they have no interest in becoming speaker or holding another leadership post. Indeed, even when women like Nicole Parra and Lynne Leach were given such opportunities, they traded them for the chance to focus on policy and their districts. Still, the nearly universal desire among them and other legislative women is to see women hold the speakership and other top leadership posts. Academic leadership supports the notion that a woman speaker would likely lead differently from a man. One extensive study which controls for “party, race, experience, the nature of the position” and the nature of the district shows that

⁹ Jackson pointed out a somewhat ironic consequence of competitive seats consuming an inordinate amount of time of the members who hold them. Those members have far less time than members in safe seats to spend with their families. So women, who traditionally have greater family obligations than men, are more likely to run for competitive seats and thus have less time to spend with their families.

“the gender of the leader appears to be the most significant indicator of the view from the top” (Little, Dunn, and Deen 44). In other words, no factor influences the priorities of leaders in state legislatures more than their gender. Specific policy differences between male and female leaders are statistically significant in the cases of health care, social services, budget matters and public safety (Ibid. 40-41).

It would be foolish to underestimate the powers of legislative leaders. They include:

- Creating the legislative agenda;
- “Manipulating the bill process”;
- Determining the composition and “leadership of committees”;
- “Controlling the floor calendar. . . and floor debate”;
- Controlling legislators’ budgets; and
- Negotiating major legislation like the state budget with the Governor (Ibid. 31-32).

Considering the tremendous power of legislative leaders, and the different priorities of women leaders, it is perfectly reasonable for female legislators to want to see one of their own in the top job. Coupled with other restrictions limiting marginal assemblywomen such as the fact that most cannot carry many (if any) large, visionary bills, these women must rely on legislative leaders to champion their priorities. That’s why assemblywoman Barbara Matthews argues that safe and marginal women should work together to elect a woman speaker. “The whole tone changes when women lead,” say Matthews. “Some women are in safe seats so other women members should rally around them for leadership positions. We’ve got to get women to run” (Interview).

Recommendation 1: Women legislators should work collectively to support women for leadership positions, including speaker and minority leader

In order to elect a woman speaker or minority leader, women legislators should concentrate on two goals: electing more women to the assembly, and uniting behind female candidates for leadership posts. As recommended previously in this paper, women need to influence their party leaders to help more women win safe seats in the legislature. They should also take a more active role. If they want to see women control the assembly, current members should earnestly recruit and groom women to run for seats in the lower house, particularly safe seats. They should look first to their own districts to seek women who can replace them after they term out of the legislature. If their replacements cannot run for leadership positions because they represent marginal seats, they can still provide support for women leaders and priorities. After identifying and preparing strong candidates in their own districts, women legislators should target safe seats from which members have the potential to hold leadership posts. They should find candidates in these districts who not only have the potential to win office, but also could be groomed for leadership.

In addition to identifying and training women to run, female lawmakers must support their candidacies monetarily. When it became apparent to some women lawmakers in 2002 that the number of women elected to the assembly, especially in the Democratic caucus, would likely decline in coming years, they started to consider developing political funds to assist women candidates. Since then both the Democratic and Republican Legislative Women’s Caucuses

have embarked on such efforts. These political committees should act swiftly and vigorously. Women legislators should capitalize on their fundraising advantage as discussed above and develop war chests they can use to help decide primary elections. They should also help their identified candidates raise their own money through mentorship, introducing them to big donors and teaching them how to raise funds successfully. By recruiting, training, and funding women candidates, female legislators can generate the votes needed to elect a woman speaker and minority leader, or at least develop a strong enough voting bloc that male leaders will be compelled to champion their issues.

The other way for female legislators to bolster women's opportunities for leadership is, as Barbara Matthews suggested, to unite behind female candidates for the top jobs. Many women legislators attempted this feat in 2003, campaigning to help Jenny Oropeza take the speakership reins. Unable to stand in solidarity behind Oropeza's candidacy, they were unsuccessful. Carol Liu recalls "We tried to gather our strength to run [Jenny Oropeza]. The problem was we didn't have enough women who would stick with her. We are our own worst enemy." Liu reports that some women legislators promised to support Oropeza then "sold us out." She says their efforts to unite behind a woman candidate were hurt by the opposition's strategy to "divide and conquer" the women's caucus (Interview). Barbara Matthews may exemplify the difficulty of the recommendation made here. While she argues that women should work together to elect a woman speaker, she admits that she did not support Oropeza. "I wanted to be for a woman. . . ." Matthews said, trailing off in an indication that she just didn't think Oropeza was the right woman for the job. Women legislators can deal with this very real obstacle in two ways. Within the two women's caucuses, the members can choose to prioritize electing women speakers and minority leaders. This would require sincere buy-in from most members and a commitment not to waver. Also, by helping more women earn seats in the assembly, they can increase the number of women's votes for top leadership positions. This will be considerably harder for Republican women to accomplish as they currently comprise less than a fifth of their party's caucus, highlighting the need for them to recruit, train and fund more women for Republican assembly seats.

Recommendation 2: Women legislators should demand key decision-making roles in the budget process, perhaps as part of the Big Five

Speaker and minority leader are not the only leadership positions women legislators should seek. They would also be wise to demand a greater role in budget negotiations. When asked her priority for women in the assembly, Nicole Parra emphatically answered, "We need to get a woman in the Big Five" (Interview). Currently the most significant budget deals are made by "the Big Five," the Governor and the leaders of both parties in both houses. It is in these Big Five meetings that leaders hammer out the framework of the final budget. Women have never had the opportunity to participate in these meetings and have thus significantly limited their ability to influence the state's spending. As women representing competitive districts are unlikely to be elected to one of the Big Five posts, they must either work to position a safe woman for speaker or minority leader, argue for the reformation of the Big Five so that it includes women's voices (perhaps morphing into the Big Seven, composed of the Big Five plus a woman from each party), or they can seek other ways to lead the budget discussion. The first option, as argued above, is plausible and could benefit women in myriad ways. The second

proposal is the least plausible. While one could imagine a scenario under which Democratic assembly and senate leaders could be swayed to add a female representative to the Big Five, perhaps in order to calm a swell of discontent among the 40% of their caucuses who are women, such a move is highly unlikely on the Republican side. The seemingly representative viewpoints of the two male Republican interviewees that it doesn't make any difference to have women in leadership, indicate that Republican leaders would not be likely to employ an affirmative action policy in their budget negotiations. This leaves the final option, developing other forms of power over the budget. Among Democrats, women have led fiscal committees in the past (Alpert was the most recent chair of senate appropriations before being termed out of office in 2004; Oropeza chaired the assembly budget committee for more than a year until the speaker who defeated her removed her from the committee in 2003) and assemblywoman Judy Chu and senator Carole Migden currently chair their respective appropriations committees. As chairs of fiscal committees, these women get to serve among the six budget conferees who negotiate the fine details of the budget while the Big Five makes the larger decisions. However, women don't always hold seats on the conference committee and it does not appear that they have ever comprised a majority or even half of the committee. Worse, Republican women almost never hold a position on the conference committee.¹⁰ Women could potentially negotiate with leadership to guarantee that they will receive a certain number of slots on the conference committee. Perhaps in exchange of support for a male speaker, majority women might want to arrange a deal to guarantee that women hold one or more majority conferee posts in each house. Similarly Republican women might be able to leverage their votes for minority leader to earn a spot on the conference committee. As conferees, these women would lead the budget and appropriations committees, probably the most important and powerful committees to chair. They would also be among the final six votes charged with deciding much of the state's annual spending. Controlling the budget is not as widely powerful as running the legislature like a speaker or minority leader would, but it is the next best thing. It is a power to which marginal assemblywomen should aspire or at least support their female colleagues in obtaining.

While women representing competitive seats may be limited in their ability to attain legislative leadership posts, they can benefit from helping other women rise to these positions. Because women leaders operate differently and hold different priorities from men, and yet marginal women are usually ineligible for leadership, it behooves such members to recruit and support women in safe seats who can become leaders. Short of strategizing successfully to get women elected speaker or minority leader, women in competitive seats should at least try to earn a prominent role in budget negotiations. Therefore, this paper recommends that women in the legislature work together to accomplish the following:

- 1) Elect a woman speaker, perhaps by utilizing the suggestions below:
 - A. Recruit and train more women to run for the assembly, focusing on grooming women to replace themselves at the end of their terms and to run for safe seats;
 - B. Raise money to support women candidates in primary and general elections;
 - C. Unite behind a woman candidate for speaker or minority leader; and

¹⁰ In recent history, Republicans nearly always have held minority party status in the legislature. Therefore they only receive two votes on the conference committee, one from each house. With Republicans in the minority, it is not clear that a woman has ever served as one of the two minority conferees. However, when Republicans briefly held power in the 1995-1996 term, they named senator Cathie Wright as one of the four majority conferees.

- 2) Negotiate to earn one or more positions in the Big Five or other significant, decision making roles in the budget process. This goal might be achieved by leveraging a bloc of women's votes in the leadership elections.

Conclusion – summary of findings and recommendations

Findings in this paper indicate that women are more likely to run for and win competitive assembly seats than safe ones and that once in those seats they legislate differently from other women. Statistical analysis proves that:

- Democratic women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for expected wins or losses;
- Republican women are more likely to run for competitive seats than they are to run for expected wins;
- Republican women are more likely than Democratic women to run in races they are expected to lose;
- Women of both parties are more likely to hold competitive seats in the legislature than seats that are safe; and
- Competitive races are more likely than other races to have 2 women candidates.

Combining this analysis with interviews of women who have run for and held competitive assembly seats, interviews with male Republican political consultants, and academic studies, we learn why women run for these seats. Findings indicate that:

- Women have fewer opportunities to run for safe seats;
- When parties recruit women to run for office, it is usually in competitive districts (there is usually a long line of insiders ready to run for safe seats when they become available);
- Republican women have a considerably difficult time winning party primaries, especially for safe seats; and
- Voter stereotypes of women candidates, the issues handled by the state legislature and the personal qualities that many women possess better position women to win competitive elections.

We also learn that women representing competitive districts legislate differently from their colleagues. Marginal members:

- Experience more freedom to vote contrary to party recommendations, but are also subject to more scrutiny and pressure from opponents and interest groups;
- Are less likely to introduce sweeping or revolutionary legislation but receive more assistance crafting a strong bill package;
- Are usually not considered for leadership positions within the legislature although many report satisfaction with their roles as committee chairs;
- Spend more time in their districts working with constituents and using the leaderships traits commonly associated with women to build consensus among diverse groups; these factors often make women legislators a good fit for marginal districts.

Evaluating the findings noted above, and working from the assumptions that gender parity is desirable and that women members would like to see women hold top legislative leadership posts, this paper makes the following recommendations:

- Women in competitive seats should support redistricting efforts to create more competitive districts and should actively participate in the redistricting process;
- The Republican party should recruit, train and fund more women to run in competitive districts, including working to help them win their party primaries;
- The Democratic party should recruit, train and fund more women to run in safe seats;
- If parties want to neutralize the gender advantage of the opposing party's female candidate, they should find more women to run;
- Assemblywomen should work earnestly to identify, groom and raise money for women to replace them and members in safe seats;
- Marginal women should rally their female colleagues to stand in solidarity to elect a woman leader; and
- Marginal women should negotiate with leadership in order for themselves and other female members to have more power in the budget process.

Each of these recommendations can alter the imbalance in the types of assembly seats women seek while increasing their ranks and bolstering their power as legislators.

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Interviews with women who ran for competitive Assembly seats

VR = Voter Registration; GEV = General election votes; Ratios are Democrats:Republicans

General Election Results are from the California Secretary of State. Unless noted, all other data in first three columns are from the *California Journal*, including rankings of seats as “Safe Democratic,” “Safe Republican,” “Toss Up,” “Leans Democratic,” or “Leans Republican.”

Name	District	Electoral History	Interview information	Notes
DeDe Alpert (D)	78 th (San Diego area)	1990, Safe R, VR 33:52, GEV 46:41, Win Beat GOP woman incumbent 1992, Toss up, VR 38:45, GEV 51:49, Win 1994, Leans D, VR 38:43, GEV 53:45, Win	Conducted in person, December 3, 2004, 11:30 a.m., San Francisco Marriott	Elected to State Senate in 1994 where she served two full terms
Julie Bornstein (D)	80 th (Palm Desert)	1992, Leans R, VR 45:43, GEV 51:49, Win 1994, Leans D, VR 49:40, GEV 44:56, Loss	Conducted by phone, January 6, 2004, 10:30 a.m.	Has not held public office since losing re-election in her second Assembly campaign.
Debra Bowen (D)	53 rd (Marina Del Rey and South Bay beach communities)	1992, Leans R, VR 42:43, GEV 55:41, Win 1994, Leans D, VR 43:41, GEV 51:44, Win 1996, Safe D, VR ??, GEV 58:42, Win	Conducted by phone, December 7, 2004, 1 p.m.	Elected to State Senate in 1998 where she is serving her second term
Susan Davis (D)	76 th (San Diego)	1994, Toss Up, VR 41:41, GEV 49:46, Win 1996, Toss Up, VR 39:39, GEV 54:44, Win 1998, Leans D, VR 41:37, GEV 65:32, Win	Conducted by phone, December 16, 2004, 11 a.m.	Elected to Congress in 2000, beating the Republican Incumbent; she is currently serving her 3 rd term in Congress
Tricia Hunter (R)	1989, 1990, 2004: 76 th (San Diego area) 1992: 80 th (Palm Desert) 1996: 78 th (San Diego)	1989, won special election to Safe R seat; numbers not currently available 1990, Safe R, VR 32:55, GEV 27:58 1992, Leans R, VR 45:43, GEV 51:49, Loss 1996, Leans R, VR 37:41, GEV 49:45, Loss 2004, Leans D, VR 40:31, GEV 54:41, Loss	Conducted by phone, December 20, 2004, 11:30 a.m.	She lost her 1992 re-election after her district boundaries were redrawn. She ran for Assembly again in 1996 and 2004, but lost both races.

Hannah-Beth Jackson (D)	35 th (Santa Barbara)	1998, Toss Up, VR 44:36, GEV 53:45, Win 2000, Leans D, VR 43:36, GEV 62:36, Win 2002, Safe D, VR 44:33 , GEV 62:32, Win	Conducted by phone, December 16, 2004, 6 p.m.	Termed out of Assembly in 2004; she is not currently holding office
Betty Karnette (D)	54 th (Long Beach)	1992, Safe R, VR?, GEV 52:44, Win 1994, Toss Up, VR 45:41, GEV 47:48, Loss 2004, Leans D, VR 44:36, GEV 53:45, Win	Conducted in person, December 7, 2004, 3:45 p.m., in her state capitol office	Elected to State Senate in 1996 where she served two full terms; she is eligible to serve her current Assembly term and one more
Lynne Leach (R)	15 th (Walnut Creek)	1996, Safe R, VR 37:47, GEV 48:49, Win 1998, Leans R, VR 38:46, GEV 38:59, Win 2000, Safe R, VR 38:44, GEV 39:61, Win	Conducted by phone, December 17, 2004, 11:00 a.m.	Ran for State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2002; lost in primary; she is not currently holding office
Carol Liu (D)	44 th (Pasadena)	2000, Leans D, VR 44:38, GEV 62:33, Win 2002, Leans D, VR 47:34 , GEV 60:37, Win 2004, Safe D, VR 46:33, GEV 66:34, Win	Conducted by phone, December 14, 2004, 2:00 p.m.	She is currently serving her final term in the Assembly; she plans to run for the Senate in 2008
Barbara Matthews (D)	17 th (Tracy/Merced)	2000, Toss Up, VR 46:42, GEV 53:45, Win 2002, Leans D, VR 46:42, GEV 56:44, Win 2004, Leans D, VR 47:40, GEV 60:40, Win	Conducted in person, December 7, 2004, 2:00 p.m., in her state capitol office	She is currently serving her final term in the Assembly
Gloria Negrete McLeod (D)	61 st (Pomona/Ontario)	2000, Toss Up, VR 45:37, GEV 54:43, Win 2002, Safe Dem, VR 51:32, GEV 63:38, Win 2004, Safe Dem, VR 48:33, GEV 64:37, Win	Conducted by phone, December 9, 2004, 10:00 a.m.	She is currently serving her final term in the Assembly
Nicole Parra (D)	30 th (Hanford/Bakersfield)	2002, Leans D, VR 48:38, GEV 50:50, Win 2004, Leans D, VR 48:40, GEV 55:45, Win	Conducted in person, December 7, 2004, 11:00 a.m., in her state capitol office	She is currently serving her second term in the Assembly

Representativeness of Sample

I set out to interview a diverse group of women who meet the following criteria:

- They have served at least one term in the Assembly; and
- They ran for a competitive seat in the Assembly in at least one of the seven elections between 1992 and 2004.

Years of candidacy: Interviewees ran for election in the following years:

1992: 5 interviewees	1994: 5 interviewees	1996: 4 interviewees	1998: 3 interviewees
2000: 5 interviewees	2002: 5 interviewees	2004: 6 interviewees	

Geographic Representation: Interviewees were more likely to have represented portions of Southern California, especially San Diego. This is explained somewhat by the location of the state's competitive seats and the electorate's willingness to elect women in these regions.

San Diego area: 5 interviewees

Los Angeles County: 3 interviewees

San Bernardino County: 1 interviewee

Central Coast: 1 interviewee

Central Valley: 3 interviewees

Party affiliation: 10 interviewees were Democrats and 2 were Republicans. Two factors restrained my ability to obtain more Republican interviews. First, many fewer Republican women than Democratic women have been elected to competitive seats; therefore, the list of potential interviewees was quite small. Further only two such Republican women held seats in the legislature while I was writing and researching this paper. While 9 out of 10 Democratic interviewees held seats in 2004 and were thus relatively easy to reach, I had only two such options among Republicans. Unfortunately, both denied multiple interview requests. However, I was able to locate two former Republican Assemblywomen to interview.

Because I could not interview a representative number of Republican Assemblywomen, I interviewed two Republican campaign consultants who have worked with both male and female Republican Assembly candidates and on competitive and non-competitive races. Interviewees were:

Steve Rogers, Republican political consultant with a leading firm in Sacramento, CA; Interview conducted by phone on December 17, 2004, 2 p.m.

Chris Wideman, Republican political consultant with a leading firm in Sacramento, CA; Interview conducted by phone on December 15, 2004, 1 p.m.

Several other male and female Assemblymembers and their staff contributed to this research through informal conversations. Because I did not request permission to use their comments in this paper they are not credited by name. Additionally, I drew upon the myriad experiences I had and interactions I witnessed while working for Democratic Assemblymembers Jack Scott and Carol Liu in 1997 and 1999-2003. Other insight is drawn from experiences working on Democratic political campaigns between 1992 and 2004 and as a volunteer political and legislative strategist for the California National Organization for Women between 1997 and 2003.